THE LITTLE RED FOOT

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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"The Slayer of Souls," "Ailsa Paige," "Athalie," "The Girl Philippa," "The Restless Sex," etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers New York

Published by arrangement with George H. Doran Company

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

MY SON

ROBERT H. CHAMBERS

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CHAPTER I

SIR WILLIAM PASSES

THE day Sir William died there died the greatest American of his day. Because, on that midsummer evening, His Excellency was still only a Virginia gentleman not yet famous, and best known because of courage and sagacity displayed in that bloody business of Braddock.

Indeed, all Americans then living, and who since have become famous, were little celebrated, excepting locally, on the day Sir William Johnson died. Few were known outside a single province; scarcely one among them had been heard of abroad. But Sir William was a world figure; a great constructive genius; the greatest land-owner in North America; a wise magistrate, a victorious soldier, a builder of cities amid a wilderness; a redeemer of men.

He was a Baronet of the British Realm; His Majesty's Superintendent of Indian Affairs for all North America. He was the only living white man implicitly trusted by the savages of this continent, because he never broke his word to them. He was, perhaps, the only representative of royal authority in the Western Hemisphere utterly believed in by the dishonest, tyrannical, and stupid pack of Royal Governors, Magistrates and lesser vermin that afflicted the colonies with the British plague.

He was kind and great. All loved him. All mourned him. For he was a very perfect gentleman who practiced truth and honour and mercy; an unassuming and respectable man who loved laughter and gaiety and plain people.

He saw the conflict coming which must drench the land in blood and dry with fire the blackened cinders.

Torn betwixt loyalty to his King whom he had so tirelessly served, and loyalty to his country which he so passionately loved,

it has been said that, rather than choose between King and Colony, he died by his own hand.

But those who knew him best know otherwise. Sir William died of a broken heart, in his great Hall at Johnstown, all alone.

His son, Sir John, killed a fine horse riding from Fort Johnson to the Hall. And arrived too late and all of a lather in the starlight.

And I have never ceased marvelling how such a man could have been the son of the great Sir William.

At the Hall the numerous household was all in a turmoil; and, besides Sir William's immediate family, there were a thousand guests—a thousand Iroquois Indians encamped around the Hall, with whom Sir William had been holding fire-council.

For he had determined to restrain his Mohawks, and to maintain tranquillity among all the fierce warriors of the Six Nations, and so pledge the entire Iroquois Confederacy to an absolute neutrality in the imminence of this war betwixt King and Colony, which now seemed to be coming so rapidly upon us that already its furnace breath was heating restless savages to a fever.

All that hot June day, though physically ill and mentally unhappy,—and under a vertical sun and with head uncovered, —Sir William had spoken to the Iroquois with belts.

The day's labour of that accursed council-fire ended at sunset; sachem and chief departed—tall spectres in the flaming west; there was a clash of steel at the guard-house as the guard presented arms; Mr. Duncan saluted the Confederacy with lifted claymore.

Then an old man, bareheaded, alone, turned away from the covered council-fire; and an officer, seeing how feebly he moved, flung an arm about his shoulders.

So Sir William came slowly to his great Hall, and slowly entered. And laid him down in his library on a sofa.

And slowly died there while the sun was going down.

Then the first star came out where, in the ashes of the June sunset, a pale rose tint still lingered.

But Sir William lay dead in his great Hall, all alone.

CHAPTER II

TWO PEERS SANS PEERAGE

SIR JOHN had arrived and I caught sight of his heavy, expressionless face, which seemed more colourless than ever in the candle light.

Consternation reigned in the Hall,—a vast tumult of whispering and guarded gabble among servants, checked by sobs,—and I saw officers come and go, and the tall forms of Mohawks still as pines on a summer night.

The entire household was there—all excepting only Michael Cardigan and Felicity Warren.

The two score farm slaves were there huddled along the wall in dusky clusters, and their great, dark eyes wet with tears.

I saw Sir William's lawyer, Lafferty, come in with Flood, the Baronet's Bouw-Meester.*

His blacksmith, his tailor, and his armourer were there; also his gardener; the German, Frank, his butler; Pontioch, his personal waiter; and those two uncanny and stunted servants, the Bartholomews, with their dead white faces and dwarfish dignity.

Also I saw poor Billy, Sir William's fiddler, gulping down the blubbers; and there was his personal physician, Doctor Daly, very grave; and the servile Wall, schoolmaster to Lady Molly's brood; and I saw Nicolas, his valet, and black Flora, his cook, both sobbing into the same bandanna.

The dark Lady Johnson was there, very quiet in her grief, slow-moving, still beautiful, having by the hands the two youngest girls and boy, while near her clustered the older children, fat Peter and Betsy and pretty Lana.

A great multitude of candles burned throughout the hall; Sir William's silver and mahogany sparkled everywhere; and so did the naked claymores of the Highlanders on guard where the dead man lay in his own chamber, done, at last, with all perplexity and grief.

In the morning came the quality in scores—all the landed

* Farm overseer.

gentry of Tryon County, Tory and Whig alike, to show their reverence:—old Colonel John Butler from his seat at Butlersbury near Caughnawaga, and his dark, graceful son Walter,—he of the melancholy golden eyes—an attorney then and sick of a wound which, some said, had been taken in a duel with Michael Cardigan near Fort Pitt.

Colonel Claus was there, too, son-in-law to Sir William, and battered much by frontier battles: and Guy Johnson, a cousin, and a son-in-law, too, had come from his fine seat at Guy Park to look upon a face as tranquil in death as a sleeping child's.

The McDonald, of damned memory, was there in his tartan and kilts and bonnet; and the Albany Patroon, very modest; and God knows how many others from far and near, all arrived to honour a man who had died very tired in the service of our Lord, who knows and pardons all.

The pretty lady of Sir John, who was Polly Watts of New York, came to me where I stood in the noon breeze near the lilacs; and I kissed her hand, and, straightening myself, retained it, looking into her woeful face of a child, all marred with tears.

"I had not thought to be mistress of the Hall for many years," said she, her lips a-tremble. "But yesterday, at this hour, he was living: and, today, in this hour, the heavy importunities of strange new duties are already crushing me. . . . I count on you, Jack."

I made no answer.

"May we not count on you?" she said. "Sir John and I expect it."

As I stood silent there in the breezy sunshine by the porch, there came across the grass Billy Alexander, who is Lord Stirling, a man much older than I, but who seemed young enough; and made his reverence to Lady Johnson, kissing the hand which I very gently released.

"Oh, Billy," says she, the tears starting again, "why should death take him at such a time, when God's wrath darkens all the world?"

"God's convenience is not always ours," he replied, looking at me sideways, with a certain curiosity which I understood if Lady Johnson did not.

She turned and gazed out across the sunny grass where, beyond the hedge fence, the primeval forest loomed like a dark cloud along the sky, far as the eye could see.

"Well," says she, half to herself, "the storm is bound to break,

now. And we women of County Tryon may need your swords, gentlemen, before snow flies."

Lord Stirling stole another look at me. He knew as well as I how loosely in their scabbards lay our two swords. He knew, also, as well as I, in which cause would flash the swords of the landed gentry of County Tryon. And he knew, too, that his blade as well as mine must, one day, be unsheathed against them and against the stupid King they served.

Something of this Lady Johnson had long since suspected, I think; but Billy Alexander, for all his years, was a childhood friend; and I, too, a friend, although more recent.

She looked at my Lord Stirling with that troubled sweetness I have seen so often in her face, alas! and she said in a low voice:

"It would be unthinkable that Lord Stirling's sword could lay a-rusting when the Boston rabble break clear out o' bounds."

She turned to me, touched my arm confidingly, child that she seemed and was, God help her.

"A Stormont," she said, "should never entertain any doubts. And so I count on you, Lord Stormont, as I count upon my Lord Stirling——"

"I am not Lord Stormont," said I, striving to force a smile at the old and tiresome contention. "Lord Stormont is the King's Ambassador in Paris—if it please you to recollect——"

"You are as surely Viscount Stormont as is Billy Alexander, here, Lord Stirling—and as I am Lady Johnson," she said earnestly. "What do you care if your titles be disputed by a doddering committee on privileges in the House of Lords? What difference does it make if usurpers wear your honours as long as you know these same stolen titles are your own?"

"A pair o' peers *sans* peerage," quoth Billy Alexander, with that boyish grin I loved to see.

"I care nothing," said I, still smiling, "but Billy Alexander does—pardon!—my Lord Stirling, I should say."

Said he: "Sure I am Lord Stirling and no one else; and shall wear my title however they dispute it who deny me my proper seat in their rotten House of Lords!"

"I think you are very surely the true Lord Stirling," said I, "but I, on the other hand, most certainly am not a Stormont Murray. My name is John Drogue; and if I be truly also Viscount Stormont, it troubles me not at all, for my ambition is to be only American and to let the Stormonts glitter as they please and where."

Lady Johnson came close to me and laid both hands upon my shoulders.

"Jack," she pleaded, "be true to us. Be true to your gentle blood. Be true to your proper caste. God knows the King will have a very instant need of his gentlemen in America before we three see another summer here in County Tryon."

I made no reply. What could I say to her? And, indeed, the matter of the Stormont Viscounty was distasteful, stale, and wearisome to me, and I cared absolutely nothing about it, though the landed gentry of Tryon were ever at pains to place me where I belonged,—if some were right,—and where I did not belong if others were righter still.

For Lady Johnson, like many of her caste, believed that the second Viscount Stormont died without issue,—which was true, —and that the third Viscount had a son,—which is debatable.

At any rate, David Murray became the fourth Viscount, and the claims of my remote ancestor went a-glimmering for so many years that, in 1705, we resumed our family name of the Northesks, which is Drogue; and in this natural manner it became my proper name. God knows I found it good enough to eat and sleep with, so that my Lord Stormont's capers in Paris never disturbed my dreams. Thank Heaven for that, too; and it was a sad day for my Lord Stormont when he tried to bully Benjamin Franklin; for the whole world is not yet done a-laughing at him.

No, I have no desire to claim a Viscounty which our witty Franklin has made ridiculous with a single shaft of satire from his bristling repertoire.

Thinking now of this, and reddening a little at the thought, —for no Stormont even of remotest kinship to the family can truly relish Mr. Franklin's sauce, though it dressed an undoubted goose,—I become far more than reconciled to the decision rendered in the House of Lords.

Two people who had come from the house, and who were advancing slowly toward us across the clipped grass, now engaged our full attention.

The one we perceived to be Sir John Johnson himself: the other his lady's school friend and intimate companion, Claudia Swift, the toast of the British Army and of all respectable young Tories; and the "Sacharissa" of those verses made by the new and lively Adjutant General, Major André, who was then a captain.

For, though very young, our lovely Sacharissa had murdered many a gallant's peace of mind, leaving a trail of hearts bled white from New York to Boston, and from that afflicted city to Albany; where, it was whispered, her bright and merciless eyes had made the sad young Patroon much sadder, and his offered manor a more melancholy abode than usual.

She gave us, now, her dimpled hand to kiss. And, to Lady Johnson: "My dear," she said very tenderly, "how pale you seem! God sends us affliction as a precious gift and we must accept it with meekness," letting her eyes rest absently the while on Lord Stirling, and then on me.

Our Sacharissa might babble of meekness if she chose, but that virtue was not lodged within her, God knows,—nor many other virtues either.

Billy Alexander, old enough to be her parent, nevertheless had been her victim; and I also. It was our opinion that we had recovered. But, to be honest with myself, I could not avoid admitting that I had been very desperate sick o' love, and that even yet, at times—— But no matter: others, stricken as deep as I, know well that Claudia Swift was not a maid that any man might easily forget, or, indeed, dismiss at will from his mind as long as she remained in his vicinity.

"Are you well, Billy, since we last met?" she asked Lord Stirling in that sweet, hesitating way of hers. And to me: "You have grown thin, Jack. Have you been in health?"

I said that I had been monstrous busy with my new glebe in the Sacandaga patent, and had swung an axe there with the best o' them until an express from Sir William summoned me to return to aid him with the Iroquois at the council-fire. At which explaining of my silence the jade smiled.

When I mentioned the Sacandaga patent and the glebe I had had of Sir William on too generous terms—he making all arrangements with Major Jelles Fonda through Mr. Lafferty—Sir John, who had been standing silent beside us, looked up at me in that cold and stealthy way of his.

"Do you mean your parcel at Fonda's Bush?" he inquired.

"Yes; I am clearing it."

"Why?"

"So that my land shall grow Indian corn, pardie!"

"Why clear it *now?*" he persisted in his deadened voice.

I could have answered very naturally that the land was of no value to anybody unless cleared of forest. But of course he knew this, too; so I did not evade the slyer intent of his question.

"I am clearing my land at Fonda's Bush," said I, "because, God willing, I mean to occupy it in proper person."

"And when, sir, is it your design to do this thing?"

"Do what, sir? Clear my glebe?"

"Remove thither—in *proper person,* Mr. Drogue?"

"As soon as may be, Sir John."

At that Lady Johnson gave me a quick look and Claudia said: "What! Would you bury yourself alive in that wilderness, Jack Drogue?"

I smiled. "But I must hew out for myself a career in the world some day, Sacharissa. So why not begin now?"

"Then in Heaven's name," she exclaimed impatiently, "go somewhere among men and not among the wild beasts of the forest! Why, a young man is like to perish of loneliness in such a spot; is he not, Sir John?"

Sir John's inscrutable gaze remained fixed on me.

"In such times as these," said he, "it is better that men like ourselves continue to live together. . . . To await events. . . . And master them. . . . And afterward, each to his vocation and his own tastes. . . . It is my desire that you remain at the Hall," he added, looking steadily at me.

"I must decline, Sir John."

"Why?"

"I have already told you why."

"If your present position is irksome to you," he said, "you have merely to name a deputy and feel entirely at liberty to pursue your pleasure. Or—you are at least the Laird of Northesk if you are nothing greater. There is a commission in my Highlanders—if you desire it. . . . And your salary, of course, continues also."

He looked hard at me: "Augmented by—half," he added in his slow, cold voice. "And this, with your income, should properly maintain a young man of your age and quality."

I had been Brent-Meester to Sir William, for lack of other employment; and had been glad to take the important office, loving as I do the open air. Also the addition of a salary to my slender means had been acceptable. But it was one matter to serve Sir William as Brent-Meester, and another to serve Sir John in any capacity whatsoever. And as for the remainder of the family,—Guy Johnson and Colonel Claus—and their intimates the Butlers, I had now had more than enough of them, having endured these uncongenial people only because I had loved Sir William. Yet,

for his father's sake, I now spoke to Sir John politely, using him most kindly because I both liked and pitied his lady, too.

Said I: "My desire is to become a Tryon County farmer, Sir John; and to that end I happily became possessed of the parcel at Fonda's Bush. For that reason I am clearing it. And so I must beg of you to accept my resignation as Brent-Meester at the Hall, for I mean to start as soon as convenient to occupy my glebe."

There was a silence; Sacharissa gazed at me in pity, astonishment, and unfeigned horror; Lady Johnson gave me an odd, unhappy look; and Billy Alexander a meaning one, half grin.

Then Sir John's slow and heavy voice invaded the momentary silence: "As my father's Brent-Meester, only an Indian or a Forest Runner knows the wilderness as do you. And we shall have great need of such forest knowledge as you possess, Mr. Drogue."

I think we all understood the Baronet's meaning.

I considered a moment, then replied very quietly that in time of stress no just cause would find me skulking to avoid duty.

I think my manner and tone, as well as what I said, combined to stop Sir John's mouth. For nobody could question such respectable sentiments unless, indeed, a quarrel was meant.

But Sir John Johnson, in his way, was as slow to mortal quarrel as was I in mine. And whatever suspicion of me he might nurse in his secret mind he now made no outward sign of it.

Also, other people were coming across the grass to join us; and presently grave greetings were exchanged in sober voices suitable to the occasion when a considerable company of ladies and gentlemen are gathered at a house of mourning.

Turning away, I noticed Mr. Duncan and the Highland officers at the magazine, all wearing their black badges of respect and a knot of crape on the basket-hilts of their claymores; and young Walter Butler, still stiff in his bandages, gazing up at the June sky out of melancholy eyes, like a damned man striving to see God.

Sir John had now given his arm to his lady. His left hand rested on his sword-hilt—the same left hand he had offered to poor Claire Putnam—and to which the child still clung, they said.

Claudia turned from Billy Alexander and came toward me. Her face was serious, but I saw the devil looking out of her blue eyes.

Nature had given this maid most lovely proportions—that charming slenderness which is plumply moulded—and she stood straight, and tall enough, too, to meet on a level the love-sick gaze of any stout young man she had bedevilled; and she wore a most bewitch-

ing countenance—short-nosed, red-lipped, a skin as white as a water-lily, and thick soft hair as black as night, which she wore unpowdered—the dangerous jade!

"Jack," says she in honeyed tones, "are you truly designing to become a hermit?"

"Oh, no," said I, smilingly, "only a farmer, Claudia."

"Why?"

"Because I am a poor man and must feed and clothe myself."

"There is a commission from Sir John in the Scotch regiment——"

"I'm Scotch enough without that," said I.

"Jack?"

"Yes, Madam?"

"Are you a little angry with me?"

"No," said I, feeling uncomfortable and concluding to beware of her, for she stood now close to me, and the scent of her warm breath troubled me.

"Why are you angry with me, Jack?" she asked sorrowfully. And took one step nearer.

"I am not," said I.

"Am—am I driving you into the wilderness?" she inquired.

"That, also, is absurd," I replied impatiently. "No woman could ever boast of driving me, though some may once have led me."

"Oh; I feared that I had sapped, perhaps, your faith in women, John."

I forced a laugh: "Why, Claudia? Because I lately—and vainly—was enamoured of you?"

"*Lately?*"

"Yes. I did love you, once."

"*Did* love?" she breathed. "Do you not love me any more, Jack?"

"I think not," said I, very cheerfully.

"And why? Sure I used you kindly, Jack. Did I not so?"

"You conducted as is the privilege of maid with man, Sacharissa," said I uneasily. "And that is all I have to say."

"How so did I conduct, Jack?"

"Sweetly—to my undoing."

"Try me again," she said, looking up at me, and the devil in her eyes.

But already I was becoming sensible of the ever-living enchantment of this young thing, so wise in stratagems and spoils of Love, and I chose to leave my scalp hang drying at her lodge door beside the scanter pol of Billy Alexander.

For God knows this vixen-virgin spared neither young nor old, but shot them through and through at sight with those heavenly darts from her twin eyes.

And no man, so far, could boast of obtaining from Mistress Swift the least token or any serious guerdon that his quest might lead him by a single step toward Hymen's altar, but only to that cruel arena where all her victims agonized under the mocking sweetness of her smile, and her pretty, down-turned and merciless thumbs—the little Vestal villain!

"No, Claudia," quoth I, "you have taken my bow and spear, and shorn me of my thatch like any Mohawk. No; I go to Fonda's Bush——" I smiled, "—to heal, perhaps, my heart, as you say; but, anyhow, to consult my soul, and armour it in a wilderness."

"A hermit!" she exclaimed scornfully, "—and afeard of a maid armed only with two matched eyes, a nose, a mouth and thirty teeth!"

"Afeard of a monster more frightful than that," said I, laughing.

"Of what monster, John Drogue?"

"Of that red monster that is surely, surely creeping northward to surprise and rend us all," said I in a low voice. "And so I shall retire to question my secret soul, and arm it cap-à-pie as God directs."

She was looking at me intently. After a silence she said:

"I do love you; and Billy Alexander; and all gay and brave young men whose unstained swords hedge the women of County Tryon from this same red monster that you mention." And watched me to see how I swallowed this.

I said warily: "Surely, Claudia, all women command our swords . . . no matter *which cause we espouse.*"

"Jack!"

"I hear you, Claudia."

But, "Oh, my God!" she breathed; and put her hands to her face. A moment she stood so, then, eyes still covered by one hand, extended the other to me. I kissed it lightly; then kissed it again.

"Do you leave us, Jack?"

I understood.

"It is you who leave me, Claudia."

She, too, understood. It was my first confession that all was not right betwixt my conscience and my King. For that was the only thing I was certain about concerning her: she never betrayed a confidence, whatever else she did. And so I made plain to her where my heart and honour lay—not with the King's men in this coming struggle—but with my own people.

I think she knew, too, that I had never before confessed as much to any living soul, for she took her other hand from her eyes and looked at me as though something had happened in which she took a sorrowful pride.

Then I kissed her hand for the third time, and let it free. And, going:

"God be with you," she said with a slight smile; "you are my dear friend, John Drogue."

At the Hall porch she turned, the mischief glimmering in her eyes: "—And so is Billy Alexander," quoth she.

So she went into the darkened Hall.

It was many months before I saw our Sacharissa again—not until Major André had made many another verse for many another inamorata, and his soldier-actors had played more than one of his farces in besieged Boston to the loud orchestra of His Excellency's rebel cannon.

CHAPTER III

THE POT BOILS

SIR WILLIAM died on the 24th of June in the year 1774; which was the twentieth year of my life.

On the day after he was buried in Saint John's Church in Johnstown, which he had built, I left the Hall for Fonda's Bush, which was a wilderness and which lay some nine miles distant in the Mohawk country, along the little river called Kennyetto.

I speak of Fonda's Bush as a wilderness; but it was not entirely so, because already old Henry Stoner, the trapper who wore two gold rings in his ears, had built him a house near the Kennyetto and had taken up his abode there with his stalwart and handsome sons, Nicholas and John, and a little daughter, Barbara.

Besides this family, who were the pioneers in that vast forest where the three patents * met, others now began settling upon the pretty little river in the wilderness, which made a thousand and most amazing windings through the Bush of Major Fonda.

There came, now, to the Kennyetto, the family of one De Silver; also the numerous families of John Homan, and Elias Cady; then the Salisburys, Putnams, Bowmans, and Helmers arrived. And Benjamin De Luysnes followed with Joseph Scott where the Frenchman, De Golyer, had built a house and a mill on the trout brook north of us. There was also a dour Scotchman come thither—a grim and decent man with long, thin shanks under his kilts, who roved the Bush like a weird and presently went away again.

But before he took himself elsewhere he marked some gigantic trees with his axe and tied a rag of tartan to a branch.

And, "Fonda's Bush is no name," quoth he. "Where a McIntyre sets his mark he returns to set his foot. And where he sets foot shall be called Broadalbin, or I am a great liar!"

And he went away, God knows where. But what he said has become true; for when again he set his foot among the dead ashes of Fonda's Bush, it became Broadalbin. And the clans came with

* The Three Patents were Sacandaga, Kayaderosseras, and Stones.

him, too; and they peppered the wilderness with their Scottish names,—Perth, Galway, Scotch Bush, Scotch Church, Broadalbin, —but my memory runs too fast, like a young hound giving tongue where the scent grows hotter!—for the quarry is not yet in sight, nor like to be for many a bloody day, alas!——

There was a forest road to the Bush, passable for waggons, and used sometimes by Sir William when he went a-fishing in the Kennyetto.

It was by this road I travelled thither, well-horsed, and had borrowed the farm oxen to carry all my worldly goods.

I had clothing, a clock, some books, bedding of my own, and sufficient pewter.

I had my own rifle, a fowling piece, two pistols, and sufficient ammunition.

And with these, and, as I say, well horsed, I rode out of Johnstown on a June morning, all alone, my heart still heavy with grief for Sir William, and deeply troubled for my country.

For the provinces, now, were slowly kindling, warmed with those pure flames that purge the human soul; and already the fire had caught and was burning fiercely in Massachusetts Bay, where John Hancock fed the flames, daintily, cleverly, with all the circumstance, impudence, and grace of your veritable macaroni who will not let an inferior outdo him in a bow, but who is sometimes insolent to kings.

Well, I was for the forest, now, to wrest from a sunless land a mouthful o' corn to stop the stomach's mutiny.

And if the Northland caught fire some day—well, I was as inflammable as the next man, who will not suffer violation of house or land or honour.

As Brent-Meester to Sir William, my duties took me everywhere. I knew old man Stoner, and Nick had become already my warm friend, though I was now a grown man of more than twenty and he still of boy's age. Yet, in many ways, he seemed more mature than I.

I think Nick Stoner was the most mischievous lad I ever knew—and admired. He sometimes said the same of me, though I was not, I think, by nature, designed for a scapegrace. However, two years in the wilderness will undermine the grace of saint or sinner in some degree. And if, when during those two hard years I went to Johnstown for a breath of civilization—or to Schenectady,

or, rarely, to Albany—I frequented a few good taverns, there was little harm done, and nothing malicious.

True, disputes with Tories sometimes led to blows, and mayhap some Albany watchman's Dutch noddle needed vinegar to soothe the flamms drummed upon it by a stout stick or ramrod resembling mine.

True, the humming ale at the Admiral Warren Tavern may sometimes have made my own young noddle hum, and Nick Stoner's, too; but there came no harm of it, unless there be harm in bussing a fresh and rosy wench or two; or singing loudly in the tap-room and timing each catch to the hammering of our empty leather jacks on long hickory tables wet with malt.

But why so sad, brother Broadbrim? Youth is not to be denied. No! And youth that sets its sinews against an iron wilderness to conquer it,—youth that wields its puny axe against giant trees,—youth that pulls with the oxen to uproot enormous stumps so that when the sun is let in there will be a soil to grow corn enough to defy starvation,—youth that toils from sun-up to dark, hewing, burning, sawing, delving, plowing, harrowing day after day, month after month, pausing only to kill the wild meat craved or snatch a fish from some forest fount,—such youth cannot be decently denied, brother Broadbrim!

But if Nick and I were truly as graceless as some stiff-necked folk pretended, always there was laughter in our scrapes, even when hot blood boiled at the Admiral Warren, and Tory and Rebel drummed one another's hides to the outrage of law and order and the mortification of His Majesty's magistrates in County Tryon.

Even in Fonda's Bush the universal fire had begun to smoulder; the names Rebel and Tory were whispered; the families of Philip Helmer and Elias Cady talked very loudly of the King and of Sir John, and how a hempen rope was the fittest cravat for such Boston men as bragged too freely.

But what most of all was in my thoughts, as I swung my axe there in the immemorial twilight of the woods, concerned the Indians of the great Iroquois Confederacy.

What would these savages do when the storm broke? What would happen to this frontier? What would happen to the solitary settlers, to such hamlets as Fonda's Bush, to Johnstown, to Schenectady—nay, to Albany itself?

Sir William was no more. Guy Johnson had become his Majesty's Superintendent for Indian affairs. He was most violently a King's man—a member of the most important family in

all the Northland, and master of six separate nations of savages, which formed the Iroquois Confederacy.

What would Guy Johnson do with the warriors of these six nations that bordered our New York frontier?

Always these questions were seething in my mind as I swung my axe or plowed or harrowed. I thought about them as I sat at eventide by the door of my new log house. I considered them as I lay abed, watching the moonlight crawl across the puncheon floor.

As Brent-Meester to Sir William, I knew Indians, and how to conduct when I encountered them in the forest, in their own castles, or when they visited the Hall.

I had no love for them and no dislike, but treated them always with the consideration due from one white man to another.

I was not conscious of making any friends among them, nor of making any enemies either. To me they were a natural part of the wilderness, like the trees, rivers, hills, and wild game, belonging there and not wantonly to be molested.

Others thought differently; trappers, forest runners, coureurs-du-bois often hated them, and lost no opportunity to display their animosity or to do them a harm.

But it was not in me to feel that way toward any living creature whom God had fashioned in His own image if not in His own colour. And who is so sure, even concerning the complexion of the Most High?

Also, Sir William's kindly example affected my sentiments toward these red men of the forest. I learned enough of their language to suit my requirements; I was courteous to their men, young and old; and considerate toward their women. Otherwise, I remained indifferent.

Now, during these first two years of my life in Fonda's Bush, events in the outer world were piling higher than those black thunder-clouds that roll up behind the Mayfield hills and climb toward mid-heaven. Already the dull glare of lightning lit them redly, though the thunder was, as yet, inaudible.

In April of my first year in Fonda's Bush a runner came to the Kennyetto with the news of Lexington, and carried it up and down the wilderness from the great Vlaie and Maxon Ridge to Frenchman's Creek and Fonda's Bush.

This news came to us just as we learned that our Continental Congress was about to reassemble; and it left our settlement very

still and sober, and a loaded rifle within reach of every man who went grimly about his spring plowing.

But the news of open rebellion in Massachusetts Bay madded our Tory gentry of County Tryon; and they became further so enraged when the Continental Congress met that they contrived a counter demonstration, and, indeed, seized upon a pretty opportunity to carry it with a high hand.

For there was a Court holden in Johnstown, and a great concourse of Tryon loyalists; and our Tory hatch-mischiefs did by arts and guile and persuasions obtain signatures from the majority of the Grand Jurors and the County Magistracy.

Which, when known and flaunted in the faces of the plainer folk of Tryon County, presently produced in all that slow, deep anger with which it is not well to trifle—neither safe for kings nor lesser fry.

In the five districts, committees were appointed to discuss what was to be the attitude of our own people and to erect a liberty pole in every hamlet.

The Mohawk district began this business, which, I think, was truly the beginning of the Revolution in the great Province of New York. The Canajoharie district, the Palatine, the Flatts, the Kingsland followed.

And, at the Mohawk district meeting, who should arrive but Sir John, unannounced, uninvited; and with him the entire company of Tory big-wigs—Colonels Claus, Guy Johnson, and John Butler, and a heavily armed escort from the Hall.

Then Guy Johnson climbed up onto a high stoop and began to harangue our unarmed people, warning them of offending Majesty, abusing them for dolts and knaves and traitors to their King, until Jacob Sammons, unable to stomach such abuse, shook his fist at the Intendant. And, said he: "Guy Johnson, you are a liar and a villain! You may go to hell, sir, and take your Indians, too!"

But Guy Johnson took him by the throat and called him a damned villain in return. Then the armed guard came at Sammons and knocked him down with their pistol-butts, and a servant of Sir John sat astride his body and beat him.

There was a vast uproar then; but our people were unarmed, and presently took Sammons and went off.

But, as they left the street, many of them called out to Sir John that it were best for him to fortify his Baronial Hall, because the day drew near when he would be more in need of swivel guns than of congratulations from his Royal Master.

Sure, now, the fire blazing so prettily in Boston was already running north along the Hudson; and Tryon had begun to smoke.

Now there was, in County Tryon, a number of militia regiments of which, when brigaded, Sir William had been our General.

Guy Johnson, also, was Colonel of the Mohawk regiment. But the Mohawk regiment had naturally split in two.

Nevertheless he paraded the Tory remainder of it, doubtless with the intention of awing the entire county.

It did awe us who were unorganized, had no powder, and whose messengers to Albany in quest of ammunition were now stopped and searched by Sir John's men.

For the Baronet, also, seemed alarmed; and, with his battalion of Highlanders, his Tory militia, his swivels, and his armed retainers, could muster five hundred men and no mean artillery to hold the Hall if threatened.

But this is not what really troubled the plain people of Tryon. Guy Johnson controlled thousands of savage Iroquois. Their war chief was Sir William's brother-in-law, brother to the dark Lady Johnson, Joseph Brant, called Thayendanegea,—the greatest Mohawk who ever lived,—perhaps the greatest of all Iroquois. And I think that Hiawatha alone was greater in North America.

Brave, witty, intelligent, intellectual, having a very genius for war and stratagems, educated like any gentleman of the day and having served Sir William as secretary, Brant, in the conventional garments of civilization, presented a charming and perfectly agreeable appearance.

Accustomed to the society of Sir William's drawing room, this Canienga Chief was utterly conversant with polite usage, and entirely qualified to maintain any conversation addressed to him. Always he had been made much of by ladies—always, when it did not too greatly weary him, was he the centre of batteries of bright eyes and the object of gayest solicitation amid those respectable gatherings for which, in Sir William's day, the Hall was so justly celebrated.

That was the modest and civil student and gentleman, Joseph Brant.

But in the forest he was a painted spectre; in battle a flame! He was a war chief: he never became Roya-neh;* but he possessed the wisdom of Hendrik, the eloquence of Red Jacket, the terrific energy of Hiakatoo.

We, of Tryon, were aware of all these things. Our ears were listening for the dread wolf cry of the Iroquois in their paint; our

* Sachem: the Canienga term.

eyes were turned in dumb expectation toward our Provincial Congress of New York; toward our dear General Schuyler in Albany; toward the Continental Congress now in solemn session; toward our new and distant hope shining clearer, brighter as each day ended—His Excellency the Virginian.

How long were Sir John and his people to be left here in County Tryon to terrorize all friends to liberty,—to fortify Johnstown, to stop us about our business on the King's highway, to intrigue with the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Cayugas, the Onondagas, the Senecas, the Tuscaroras?

Guy Johnson tampered with the River Indians at Poughkeepsie, and we knew it. He sent belts to the Shawanese, to the Wyandottes, to the Mohicans. We knew it. He met the Delaware Sachems at a mongrel fire—God knows where and by what authority, for the Federal Council never gave it!—and we stopped one of his runners in the Bush with his pouch full o' belts and strings; and we took every inch of wampum without leave of Sir John, and bade the runner tell him what we did.

We wrote to Albany; Albany made representations to Sir John, and the Baronet replied that his show of armed force at the Hall was solely for the reason that he had been warned that the Boston people were laying plans to invade Tryon and make of him a prisoner.

I think this silly lie was too much for Schuyler, for all now knew that war must come. Twelve Colonies, in Congress assembled, had announced that they had rather die as free people than continue to live as slaves. Very fine indeed! But what was of more interest to us at Fonda's Bush, this Congress commissioned George Washington as Commander in Chief of a Colonial Army of 20,000 men, and prepared to raise three millions on bills of credit *for the prosecution of the war!*

Now, at last, the cleavage had come. Now, at last, Sir John was forced into the open.

He swore by Almighty God that he had had no hand in intriguing against the plain people of Tryon: and while he was making this oath, Guy Johnson was raising the Iroquois against us at Oswego; he was plotting with Carleton and Haldimand at Montreal; he had arranged for the departure of Brant with the great bulk of the Mohawk nation, and, with them, the fighting men of the Iroquois Confederacy. Only the Western Gate Keepers remained,—the fierce Senecas.

And so, except for a few Tuscaroras, a few lukewarm Onondagas, a few of the Lenape, and perhaps half—possibly two-thirds

of the Oneida nation, Guy Johnson already had swung the terrible Iroquois to the King.

And now, secretly, the rats began to leave for the North, where, behind the Canada border, savage hordes were gathering by clans, red and white alike.

Guy Johnson went on pretense of Indian business; and none dare stop the Superintendent for Indian affairs on a mission requiring, as he stated, his personal appearance at Oswego.

But once there he slipped quietly over into Canada; and Brant joined him.

Colonel Claus sneaked North; old John Butler went in the night with a horde of Johnstown and Caughnawaga Tories. McDonald followed, accompanied by some scores of bare-shinned Tory Mc's. Walter Butler disappeared like a phantom.

But Sir John remained behind his stockade and swivels at the Hall, vowing and declaring that he meditated no mischief—no, none at all.

Then, in a fracas in Johnstown, that villain sheriff, Alexander White, fired upon Sammons, and the friends to liberty went to take the murderous Tory at the jail.

Frey was made sheriff, which infuriated Sir John; but Governor Tryon deposed him and reappointed White, so the plain people went again to do him a harm; and he fled the district to the mortification of the Baronet.

But Sir John's course was nearly at an end: and events in the outer world set the sands in his cloudy glass running very swiftly. Schuyler and Montgomery were directing a force of troops against Montreal and Quebec, and Sir Guy Carleton, Governor General of Canada, was shrieking for help.

St. John's surrendered, and *the Mohawk Indians began fighting!*

Here was a pretty pickle for Sir John to explain.

Suddenly we had news of the burning of Falmouth.

On a bitter day in early winter, an Express passed through Fonda's Bush on snow-shoes, calling out a squad of the Mohawk Regiment of District Militia.

Nick Stoner, Andrew Bowman, Joe Scott, and I answered the summons.

Snow-shoeing was good—a light fall on the crust—and we pulled foot for the Kingsborough trail, where we met up with a squad from the Palatine Regiment and another from the Flatts.

But scarce were we in sight of Johnstown steeples when the

drums of an Albany battalion were heard; and we saw, across the snow, their long brown muskets slanting, and heard their bugle-horn on the Johnstown road.

I saw nothing of the affair at the Hall, being on guard at St. John's Church, lower down in the town. But I saw our General Schuyler ride up the street with his officers; and so knew that all would go well.

All went well enough, they say. For when again the General rode past the church, I saw waggons under our escort piled with the muskets of the Highland Battalion, and others heaped high with broad-swords, pistols, swivels, and pikes. And on Saturday, the twentieth of January, when our tour of duty ended, and our squads were dismissed, each to its proper district, all people knew that Sir John Johnson had given his parole of honor not to take up arms against America; not to communicate with the Royalists in Canada; not to oppose the friends of liberty at home; nor to stir from his Baronial Hall to go to Canada or to the sea, but with liberty to transact such business as might be necessary in other parts of this colony.

And I, for one, never doubted that a son of the great Sir William would keep his word and sacred parole of honour.

CHAPTER IV

TWO COUNTRY MICE

IT was late in April, and I had boiled my sap and had done with my sugar bush for another year. The snow was gone; the Kennyetto roared amber brilliant through banks of melting ice, and a sweet odour of arbutus filled all the woods.

Spring was in the land and in my heart, too, and when Nick Stoner galloped to my door in his new forest dress, very fine, I, nothing loath, did hasten to dress me in my new doe-skins, not less fine than Nick's and lately made for me by a tailor-woman in Kingsborough who was part Oneida and part Dutch.

That day I wore a light, round cap of silver mole fur with my unshorn hair, all innocent of queue or powder, curling crisp like a woman's. Of which I was ashamed and eager to visit Toby Tice, our Johnstown barber, and be trimmed.

My new forest dress, as I say, was of doe-skin—a laced shirt belted in, shoulder-caped, cut round the neck to leave my throat free, and with long thrums on sleeve and skirt against need.

Trews shaped to fit my legs close; and thigh moccasins, very deep with undyed fringe, but ornamented by an infinite pattern of little green vines, made me brave in my small mirror. And my ankle moccasins were gay with Oneida devices wrought out of porcupine quills and beads, scarlet, green, purple, and orange, and laid open at the instep by two beaded flaps.

I saddled my mare, Kaya, in her stall, which was a log wing to my house, and presently mounted and rode around to where Nick sat his saddle a-playing on his fife, which he carried everywhere with him, he loving music but obliged to make his own.

"Lord Harry!" cried he on seeing me so fine. "If you are not truly a Viscount then you look one!"

"I would not change my name and health and content," said I, "for a king's gold crown today." And I clinked the silver coins in my pouch and laughed. And so we rode away along the Johnstown road.

He also, I think, was dying for a frolic. Young minds in trouble as well as hard-worked bodies need a holiday now and

then. He winked at me and chinked the shillings in his bullet-pouch.

"We shall see all the sights," quoth he, "and the Kennyetto could not quench my thirst today, nor our two horses eat as much, nor since time began could all the lovers in history love as much as could I this April day. . . . Were there some pretty wench of my own mind to use me kindly. . . . Like that one who smiled at us —do you remember?"

"At Christmas?"

"That's the one!" he exclaimed. "Lord! but she was handsome in her sledge!—and her sister, too, Jack."

"I forget their names," said I.

"Browse," he said, "—Jessica and Betsy. And they live at Pigeon-Wood near Mayfield."

"Oho!" said I, "you have made their acquaintance!"

He laughed and we galloped on.

Nick sang in his saddle, beating time upon his thigh with his life:

"Flammadiddle!
Paddadiddle!
Flammadiddle dandy!
My Love's kisses
Are sweet as sugar-candy!
Flammadiddle!
Paddadiddle!
Flammadiddle dandy!
She makes fun o' me
Because my legs are bandy——"

He checked his gay refrain:

"Speaking of flamms," said he, "my brother John desires to be a drummer in the Continental Line."

"He is only fourteen," said I, laughing.

"I know. But he is a tall lad and stout enough. What will be your regiment, Jack?"

"I like Colonel Livingston's," said I, "but nobody yet knows what is to be the fate of the district militia and whether the Mohawk regiment, the Palatine, and the other three are to be recruited to replace the Tory deserters, or what is to be done."

Nick flourished his flute: "All I know," he said, "is that my father and brother and I mean to march."

"I also," said I.

"Then it's in God's hands," he remarked cheerfully, "and I mean to use my ears and eyes in Johnstown today."

We put our horses to a gallop.

We rode into Johnstown and through the village, very pleased to be in civilization again, and saluting many wayfarers whom we recognized, Tory and Whig alike. Some gave us but a cold good-day and looked sideways at our forest dress; others were marked in cordiality,—men like our new Sheriff, Frey, and the two Sammonses and Jacob Shew.

We met none of the Hall people except the Bouw-Meester, riding beside five yoke of beautiful oxen, who drew bridle to exchange a mouthful of farm gossip with me while the grinning slaves waited on the footway, goads in hand.

Also, I saw out o' the tail of my eye the two Bartholomews passing, white and stunted and uncanny as ever, but pretended not to notice them, for I had always felt a shiver when they squeaked good-day at me, and when they doffed hats the tops of their heads had blue marbling on the scalp under their scant dry hair. Which did not please me.

Whilst I chattered with the Bouw-Meester of seeds and plowing, Nick, who had no love for husbandry, practiced upon his fife so windily and with such enthusiasm that we three horsemen were soon ringed round by urchins of the town on their reluctant way to school.

"How's old Wall?" cried Nick, resting his puckered lips and wiping his fife. "There's a schoolmaster for pickled rods, I warrant. Eh, boys? Am I right?"

Lads and lassies giggled, some sucked thumbs and others hung their heads.

"Come, then," cried Nick, "he's a good fellow, after all! And so am I—when I'm asleep!"

Whereat all the children giggled again and Nick fished a great cake of maple sugar from his Indian pouch, drew his war-hatchet, broke the lump, and passed around the fragments. And many a childish face, which had been bright and clean with scrubbing, continued schoolward as sticky as a bear cub in a bee-tree.

And now the Bouw-Meester and his oxen and the grinning slaves had gone their way; so Nick and I went ours.

There were taverns enough in the town. We stopped at one or two for a long pull and a dish of meat.

Out of the window I could see something of the town and it seemed changed; the Court House deserted; the jail walled in by

a new palisade; fewer people on the street, and little traffic. Nor did I perceive any red-coats ruffling it as of old; the Highlanders who passed wore no side-arms,—excepting the officers. And I thought every Scot looked glum as a stray dog in a new village, where every tyke moves stiffly as he passes and follows his course with evil eyes.

We had silver in our bullet pouches. We visited every shop, but purchased nothing useful; for Nick bought sweets and a mouse-trap and some alley-taws for his brother John—who wished to go to war! Oh, Lord!—and for his mother he found skeins of brightly-coloured wool; and for his father a Barlow jack-knife.

I bought some suckets and fish-hooks and a fiddle,—God knows why, for I can not play on it, nor desire to!—and I further purchased two books, "Lives of Great Philosophers," by Rudd, and a witty poem by Peter Pindar, called "The Lousiad"—a bold and mirthful lampoon on the British King.

These packets we stowed in our saddle-bags, and after that we knew not what to do save to seek another tavern.

But Nick was no toss-pot, nor was I. And having no malt-thirst, we remained standing in the street beside our horses, debating whether to go home or no.

"Shall you pay respects at the Hall?" he asked seriously.

But I saw no reason to go, owing no duty; and the visit certain to prove awkward, if, indeed, it aroused in Sir John no more violent emotion than pain at sight of me.

With our bridles over our arms, still debating, we walked along the street until we came to the Johnson Arms Tavern,—a Tory rendezvous not now frequented by friends of liberty.

It was so dull in Johnstown that we tied our horses and went into the Johnson Arms, hoping, I fear, to stir up a mischief inside.

Their brew was poor; and the spirits of the dozen odd Tories who sat over chess or draughts, or whispered behind soiled gazettes, was poorer still.

All looked up indifferently as we entered and saluted them.

"Ah, gentlemen," says Nick, "this is a glorious April day, is it not?"

"It's well enough," said a surly man in horn spectacles, "but I should be vastly obliged, sir, if you would shut the door, which you have left swinging in the wind."

"Sir," says Nick, "I fear you are no friend to God's free winds. Free winds, free sunshine, free speech, these suit my fancy. Freedom, sir, in her every phase—and Liberty—the glorious jade!

Ah, gentlemen, there's a sweetheart you can never tire of. Take my advice and woo her, and you'll never again complain of a breeze on your shins!"

"If you are so ardent, sir," retorted another man in a sneering voice, "why do you not go courting your jade in Massachusetts Bay?"

"Because, sir," said I, "our sweetheart, Mistress Liberty, is already on her joyous way to Johnstown. It is a rendezvous, gentlemen. Will it please you to join us in receiving her?"

One man got up, overturning the draught board, paid his reckoning, and went out muttering and gesticulating.

"A married man," quoth Nick, "and wedded to that old hag, Tyranny. It irks him to hear of fresh young jades, knowing only too well what old sour-face awaits him at home with the bald end of a broom."

The dark looks cast at us signalled storms; but none came, so poor the spirit of the company.

"Gentlemen, you seem melancholy and distrait," said I. "Are you so pensive because my Lord Dunmore has burned our pleasant city of Norfolk? Is it that which weighs upon your minds? Or is the sad plight of Tommy Gage distressing you? Or the several pickles in which Sir Guy Carleton, General Burgoyne, and General Howe find themselves?"

"Possibly," quoth Nick, "a short poem on these three British warriors may enliven you:

"Carleton, Burgoyne, Howe,
"Bow-wow-wow!"

But there was nothing to be hoped of these sullen Tories, for they took our laughter scowling, but budged not an inch. A pity, for it was come to a pretty pass in Johnstown when two honest farmers must go home for lack of a rogue or two of sufficient spirit to liven a dull day withal.

We stopped at the White Doe Tavern, and Nick gave the company another poem, which he said was writ by my Lord North:

"O Boston wives and maids draw near and see
Our delicate Souchong and Hyson tea;
Buy it, my charming girls, fair, black, or brown;
If not, we'll cut your throats and burn your town!"

Whereat all the company laughed and applauded; and there was no hope of any sport to be had there, either.

"Well," said Nick, sighing, "the war seems to be done ere it begun. What's in those whelps at the Johnson Arms, that they stomach such jests as we cook for them? Time was when I knew where I could depend upon a broken head in Johnstown—mine own or another's."

We had it in mind to dine at the Doe, planning, as we sat on the stoop, bridles in hand, to ride back to the Bush by new moonlight.

"If a pretty wench were as rare as a broken head in Johnstown," he muttered, "I'd be undone, indeed. Come, Jack; shall we ride that way homeward?"

"Which way?"

"By Pigeon-Wood."

"By Mayfield?"

"Aye."

"You have a sweetheart there, you say?"

"And so, perhaps, might you, for the pain of passing by."

"No," said I, "I want no sweetheart. To clip a lip en passant, if the lip be warm and willing,—that is one thing. A blush and a laugh and 'tis over. But to journey in quest of gallantries with malice aforethought—no."

"I saw her in a sledge," sighed Nick, sucking his empty pipe. "And followed. Lord, but she is handsome,—Betsy Browse!—and looked at me kindly, I thought. . . . We had a fight."

"What?"

"Her father and I. For an hour the old man nigh twisted his head off turning around to see what sledge was following his. Then he shouts, 'Whoa!' and out he bounces into the snow; and I out o' my sledge to see what it was he wanted.

"He wanted my scalp, I think, for when I named myself and said I lived at Fonda's Bush, he fetched me a knock with his frozen mittens,—Lord, Jack, I saw a star or two, I warrant you; and a gay stream squirted from my nose upon the snow and presently the whole wintry world looked red to me, so I let fly a fist or two at the old man, and he let fly a few more at me.

" 'Dammy!' says he, 'I'll learn ye to foller my darters, you poor dum Boston critter! I'll drum your hide from Fundy's Bush to Canady!'

"But after I had rolled him in the snow till his scratch-wig fell off, he became more civil—quite polite for a Tory with his mouth full o' snow.

"So I went with him to his sledge and made a polite bow to the ladies—who looked excited but seemed inclined to smile when I promised to pass by Pigeon-Wood some day."

"A rough wooing," said I, laughing.

"Rough on old man Browse. But he's gone with Guy Johnson."

"What! To Canada? The beast!"

"Aye. So I thought to stop some day at Pigeon-Wood to see if the cote were entirely empty or no. Lord, what a fight we had, old Browse and I, there in the snow of the Mayfield road! And he burly as an October bear—a man all knotted over with muscles, and two fists that slapped you like the front kick of a moose! Oh, Lordy! Lordy! What a battle was there. . . . What bright eyes hath that little jade Betsy, of Pigeon-Wood!"

Now, as he spoke, I had a mind to see this same Tory girl of Pigeon-Wood; and presently admitted to him my curiosity.

And then, just as we had mounted and were gathering bridles and searching for our stirrups with moccasined toes, comes a galloper in scarlet jacket and breeks, with a sealed letter waved high to halt me.

Sitting my horse in the street, I broke the seal and read what was written to me.

The declining sun sent its rosy shafts through the still village now, painting every house and setting glazed windows a-glitter.

I looked around me, soberly, at the old and familiar town; I glanced at Nick; I gazed coldly upon the galloper,—a cornet of Border Horse, and as solemn as he was young.

"Sir," said I, "pray present to Lady Johnson my duties and my compliments, and say that I am honoured by her ladyship's commands, and shall be—happy—to present myself at Johnson Hall within the hour."

Young galloper salutes; I outdo him in exact and scrupulous courtesy, mole-skin cap in hand; and 'round he wheels and away he tears like the celebrated Tory in the song, Jock Gallopaway.

"Here's a kettle o' fish," remarked Nick in disgust.

"Were it not Lady Johnson," muttered I, but checked myself. After all, it seemed ungenerous that I should decline to see even Sir John, who now was virtually a prisoner of my own party, penned here within that magnificent domain of which his great father had been creator and absolute lord.

"I must go, Nick," I said in a low voice.

He said with a slight sneer, "Noblesse oblige——" and then, sorry, laid a quick hand on my arm.

"Forgive me, Jack. My father wears two gold rings in his ears. Your father wore them on his fingers. I know I am a boor until your kindness makes me forget it."

I said quietly: "We are two comrades and friends to liberty. It is not what we are born to but what we are that matters a copper penny in the world."

"It is easy for you to say so."

"It is important for you to believe so. As I do."

"Do you really so?" he asked with that winning upward glance that revealed his boyish faith in me.

"I really do, Nick; else, perhaps, I had been with Guy Johnson in Canada long ago."

"Then I shall try to believe it, too," he murmured, "—whether ears or fingers or toes wear the rings."

We laughed.

"How long?" he inquired bluntly.

"To sup, I think. I must remain if Lady Johnson requests it of me."

"And afterward. Will you ride home by way of Pigeon-Wood?"

"Will you still be lingering there?" I asked with a smile.

"Whether the pigeon-cote be empty or full, I shall await you there."

I nodded. We smiled at each other and wheeled our horses in opposite directions.

CHAPTER V

A SUPPER

NOW, what seemed strange to me at the Hall was the cheerfulness of all under circumstances which must have mortified any Royalist, and, in particular, the principal family in North America of that political complexion.

Even Sir John, habitually cold and reserved, appeared to be in most excellent spirits for such a man, and his wintry smile shed its faint pale gleam more than once upon the company assembled at supper.

On my arrival there seemed to be nobody there except the groom, who took my mare, Kaya, and Frank, Sir William's butler, who ushered me and seemed friendly.

Into the drawing room came black Flora, all smiles, to say that the gentlemen were dressing but that Lady Johnson would receive me.

She was seated before her glass in her chamber, and the red-cheeked Irish maid she had brought from New York was exceedingly busy curling her hair.

"Oh, Jack!" said Lady Johnson softly, and holding out to me one hand to be saluted, "they told me you were in the village. Has it become necessary that I must send for an old friend who should have come of his own free will?"

"I thought perhaps you and Sir John might not take pleasure in a visit from me," I replied, honestly enough.

"Why? Because last winter you answered the district summons and were on guard at the church with the Rebel Mohawk company?"

So she knew that, too. But I had scarcely expected otherwise. And it came into my thought that the dwarfish Bartholomews had given her news of my doings and my whereabouts.

"Come," said she in her lively manner, "a good soldier obeys his colonel, whoever that officer may chance to be—*for the moment.* And, were you even otherwise inclined, Jack, of what use would it have been to disobey after Philip Schuyler disarmed our poor Scots?"

"If Sir John feels as you do, it makes my visit easier for all," said I.

"Sir John," she replied, "is not a whit concerned. We here at the Hall have laid down our arms; we are peaceably disposed; farm duties begin; a multitude of affairs preoccupy us; so let who will fight out this quarrel in Massachusetts Bay, so only that we have tranquillity and peace in County Tryon."

I listened, amazed, to this school-girl chatter, marvelling that she herself believed such pitiable nonsense.

Yet, that she did believe it I was assured, because in my Lady Johnson there was nothing false, no treachery or lies or cunning.

Somebody sure had filled her immature mind with this jargon, which now she repeated to me. And in it I vaguely perceived the duplicity and ingenious manœuvring of wills and minds more experienced than her own.

But I said only that I hoped this county might escape the conflagration now roaring through all New England and burning very fiercely in Virginia and the Carolinas. Then, smiling, I made her a compliment on her hair, which her Irish maid was dressing very prettily, and laughed at her man's banyan which she so saucily wore in place of a levete. Only a young and pretty woman could presume to wear a flowered silk banyan at her toilet; but it mightily became Polly Johnson.

"Claudia is here," she remarked with a kindly malice perfectly transparent.

I took the news in excellent part, and played the hopeless swain for a while, to amuse her, and so cunningly, too, that presently the charming child felt bound to comfort me.

"Claudia is a witch," says she, "and does vast damage to no purpose but that it feeds her vanity. And this I have said frequently to her very face, and shall continue until she chooses to refrain from such harmful coquetry, and seems inclined to a more serious consideration of life and duty."

"Claudia serious!" I exclaimed. "When Claudia becomes pensive, beware of her!"

"Claudia should marry early—as I did," said she. But her features grew graver as she said it, and I saw not in them that inner light which makes delicately radiant the face of happy wifehood.

I thought, "God pity her," but I said gaily enough that retribution must one day seize Claudia's dimpled hand and place it in the grasp of some gentleman fitly fashioned to school her.

We both laughed; then she being ready for her stays and

gown, I retired to the library below, where, to my chagrin, who should be lounging but Hiakatoo, war chief of the Senecas, in all his ceremonial finery. Despite what dear Mary Jamison has written of him, nor doubting that pure soul's testimony, I knew Hiakatoo to be a savage beast and a very devil, the more to be suspected because of his terrible intelligence.

With him was a Mr. Hare, sometime Lieutenant in the Mohawk Regiment, with whom I had a slight acquaintance. I knew him to be Tory to the bone, a deputy of Guy Johnson for Indian affairs, and a very shifty character though an able officer of county militia and a scout of no mean ability.

Hare gave me good evening with much courtesy and self-possession. Hiakatoo, also, extended a muscular hand, which I was obliged to take or be outdone in civilized usage by a savage.

"Well, sir," says Hare in his frank, misleading manner, "the last o' the sugar is a-boiling, I hear, and spring plowing should begin this week."

Neither he nor Hiakatoo had as much interest in husbandry as two hoot-owls, nor had they any knowledge of it, either; but I replied politely, and, at their request, gave an account of my glebe at Fonda's Bush.

"There is game in that country," remarked Hiakatoo in the Seneca dialect.

Instantly it entered my head that his remark had two interpretations, and one very sinister; but his painted features remained calmly inscrutable and perhaps I had merely imagined the dull, hot gleam that I thought had animated his sombre eyes.

"There is game in the Bush," said I, pleasantly,—"deer, *bear,* turkeys, and partridges a-drumming *the long roll* all day long. And I have seen a moose near Lake Desolation."

Now I had replied to the Seneca in the Canienga dialect; and he might interpret in two ways my reference to *bears,* and also what I said concerning the *drumming* of the partridges.

But his countenance did not change a muscle, nor did his eyes. And as for Hare, he might not have understood my play upon words, for he seemed interested merely in a literal interpretation, and appeared eager to hear about the moose I had seen near Lake Desolation.

So I told him I had watched two bulls fighting in the swamp until the older beast had been driven off.

"Civilization, too, will soon drive away the last of the moose from Tryon," quoth Hare.

"How many families at Fonda's Bush?" asked Hiakatoo abruptly.

I was about to reply, telling him the truth, and checked myself with lips already parted to speak.

There ensued a polite silence, but in that brief moment I was convinced that they realized I suddenly suspected them.

What I might have answered the Seneca I do not exactly know, for the next instant Sir John entered the room with Ensign Moucher, of the old Mohawk Regiment, and young Captain Watts from New York, brother to Polly, Lady Johnson, a handsome, dissipated, careless lad, inclined to peevishness when thwarted, and marred, perhaps, by too much adulation.

Scarce had compliments been exchanged with snuff when Lady Johnson entered the room with Claudia Swift, and I thought I had seldom beheld two lovelier ladies in their silks and powder, who curtsied low on the threshold to our profound bows.

As I saluted Lady Johnson's hand again, she said: "This is most kind of you, Jack, because I know that all farmers now have little time to waste."

"Like Cincinnatus," said I, smilingly, "I leave my plow in the furrow at the call of danger, and hasten to brave the deadly battery of your bright eyes."

Whereupon she laughed that sad little laugh which I knew so well, and which seemed her manner of forcing mirth when Sir John was present.

I took her out at her request. Sir John led Claudia; the others paired gravely, Hare walking with the Seneca and whispering in his ear.

Candles seemed fewer than usual in the dining hall, but were sufficient to display the late Sir William's plate and glass.

The scented wind from Claudia's fan stirred my hair, and I remembered it was still the hair of a forest runner, neither short nor sufficiently long for the queue, and powdered not a trace.

I looked around at Claudia's bright face, more brilliant for the saucy patches and newly powdered hair.

"La," said she, "you vie with Hiakatoo yonder in Mohawk finery, Jack,—all beads and thrums and wampum. And yet you have a pretty leg for a silken stocking, too."

"In the Bush," said I, "the backwoods aristocracy make little of your silk hosen, Claudia. Our stockings are leather and our powder black, and our patches are of buckskin and are sewed on elbow and knee with pack-thread or sinew. Or we use them, too, for wadding."

"It is a fashion like another," she remarked with a shrug, but watching me intently over her fan's painted edge.

"The mode is a tyrant," said I, "and knows neither pity nor good taste."

"How so?"

"Why, Hiakatoo also wears paint, Claudia."

"Meaning that I wear lip-rouge and lily-balm? Well, I do, my impertinent friend."

"Who could suspect it?" I protested, mockingly.

"You might have suspected it long since had you been sufficiently adventurous."

"How so?" I inquired in my turn.

"By kissing me, pardieu! But you always were a timid youth, Jack Drogue, and a woman's 'No,' with the proper stare of indignation, always was sufficient to route you utterly."

In spite of myself I reddened under the smiling torment.

"And if any man has had that much of you," said I, "then I for one will believe it only when I see your lip-rouge on his lips!"

"Court me again and then look into your mirror," she retorted calmly.

"What in the world are you saying to each other?" exclaimed Lady Johnson, tapping me with her fan. "Why, you are red as a squaw-berry, Jack, and your wine scarce tasted."

Claudia said: "I but ask him to try his fortune, and he blushes like a silly."

"Shame," returned Lady Johnson, laughing; "and you have Mr. Hare's scalp fresh at your belt!"

Hare heard it, and laughed in his frank way, which instantly disarmed most people who had not too often heard it.

"I admit," said he, "that I shall presently perish unless this cruel lady proves kinder, or restores to me my hair."

"It were more merciful," quoth Ensign Moucher, "to slay outright with a single glance. I myself am long since doubly dead," he added with his mealy-mouthed laugh, and his mean reddish eyes a-flickering at Lady Johnson.

Sir John, who was carving a roast of butcher's meat, carved on, though his young wife ventured a glance at him—a sad, timid look as though hopeful that her husband might betray some interest when other men said gallant things to her.

I asked Sir John's permission to offer a toast, and he gave it with cold politeness.

"To the two cruellest and loveliest creatures alive in a love-stricken world," said I. "Gentlemen, I offer you our charming

tyrants. And may our heads remain ever in the dust and their silken shoon upon our necks!"

All drank standing. The Seneca gulped his Madiera like a slobbering dog, noticing nobody, and then fell fiercely to cutting up his meat, until, his knife being in the way, he took the flesh in his two fists and gnawed it.

But nobody appeared to notice the Seneca's beastly manners; and such general complaisance preoccupied me, because Hiakatoo knew better, and it seemed as though he considered himself in a position where he might disdain to conduct suitably amid a company which, possibly, stood in need of his good will.

Nobody spoke of politics, nor did I care to introduce such a subject. Conversation was general; matters concerning the town, the Hall, were mentioned, together with such topics as are usually discussed among land owners in time of peace.

And it seemed to me that Sir John, who had, as usual, remained coldly reticent among his guests, became of a sudden conversational with a sort of forced animation, like a man who recollects that he has a part to play and who unwillingly attempts it.

He spoke of the Hall farm, and of how he meant to do this with this part and that with that part; and how the herd bulls were now become useless and he must send to the Patroon for new blood,—all a mere toneless and mechanical babble, it seemed to me, and without interest or sincerity.

Once, sipping my claret, I thought I heard a faint clash of arms outside and in the direction of the guard-house.

And another time it seemed to me that many horses were stirring somewhere outside in the darkness.

I could not conceive of anything being afoot, because of Sir John's parole, and so presently dismissed the incidents from my mind.

The wine had somewhat heated the men; laughter was louder, speech less guarded. Young Watts spoke boldly of Haldimand and Guy Carleton, naming them as the two most efficient servants that his Majesty had in Canada.

Nobody, however, had the effrontery to mention Guy Johnson in my presence, but Ensign Moucher pretended to discuss a probable return of old John Butler and of his son Walter to our neighborhood,—to hoodwink me, I think,—but his mealy manner and the false face he pulled made me the more wary.

The wine burned in Hiakatoo, but he never looked toward me nor directly at anybody out of his blank red eyes of a panther.

Sir John had become a little drunk and slopped his wine-glass, but the wintry smile glimmered on his thin lips as though some secret thought contented him, and he was ever whispering with Captain Watts.

But he spoke always of the coming summer and of his cattle and fields and the pursuits of peace, saying that he had no interest in Haldimand nor in any kinsmen who had fled Tryon; and that all he desired was to be let alone at the Hall, and not bothered by Phil Schuyler.

"For," says he, emptying his glass with unsteady hand, "I've enough to do to feed my family and my servants and collect my rents; and I'm damned if I can do it unless those excitable gentlemen in Albany mind their own business as diligently as I wish to mind mine."

"Surely, Sir John," said I, "nobody wishes to annoy you, because it is the universal desire that you remain. And, as you have pledged your honour to do so, only a fool would attempt to make more difficult your position among us."

"Oh, there are fools, too," said he in his slow voice. "There were fools who supposed that the Six Nations would not resent ill treatment meeted out to Guy Johnson." His cold gaze rested for a second upon Hiakatoo, then swept elsewhere.

Preoccupied, I heard Claudia's voice in my ear:

"Do you take no pleasure any longer in looking at me, Jack? You have paid me very scant notice tonight."

I turned, smilingly made her a compliment, and she was now gazing into the little looking-glass set in the handle of her French fan, and her dimpled hand busy with her hair.

"Polly's Irish maid dressed my hair," she remarked. "I would to God I had as clever a wench. Could you discover one to wait on me?"

Hare, who had no warrant for familiarity, as far as I was concerned, nevertheless called out with a laugh that I knew every wench in the countryside and should find a pretty one very easily to serve Claudia.

Which pleasantry did not please me; but Ensign Moucher and young Watts bore him out, and they all fell a-laughing, discussing with little decency such wenches as the two Wormwood girls near Fish House, and Betsy and Jessica Browse—maids who were pretty and full of gaiety at dance or frolic, and perhaps a trifle free in manners, but of whom I knew no evil and believed none whatever the malicious gossip concerning them.

The gallantries of such men as Sir John and Walter Butler were

known to everybody in the country; and so were the carryings on of all the younger gentry and the officers from Johnstown to Albany. Young girls' names—the daughters of tenants, settlers, farmers, were bandied about carelessly enough; and the names of those famed for beauty, or a lively disposition, had become more or less familiar to me.

Yet, for myself, my escapades had been harmless enough—a pretty maid kissed at a quilting, perhaps; another courted lightly at a barn-romp; a laughing tavern wench caressed en passant, but no evil thought of it and nothing to regret—no need to remember aught that could start a tear in any woman's eyes.

Watts said to Claudia: "There is a maid at Caughnawaga who serves old Douw Fonda—a Scotch girl, who might serve you as well as Flora cares for my sister."

"Penelope Grant!" exclaims Hare with an oath. Whereat these three young men fell a-laughing, and even Sir John leered.

I had heard her name and that the careless young gallants of the country were all after this young Scotch girl, servant to Douw Fonda—but I had never seen her.

"She lives with the old gentleman, does she not?" inquired Claudia with a shrug.

"She cares for him, dresses him, cooks for him, reads to him, sews, mends, lights him to bed and tucks him in," said Hare. "My God, what a wife she'd make for a farmer! Or a mistress for a gentleman."

"A wench I would employ very gladly," quoth Claudia, frowning. "Could you get her ear, Jack, and fetch her?"

"Take her from Douw Fonda?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"The old man is like to die any moment," remarked Watts.

"Besides," said Moucher, "he has scores of kinsmen and their women to take him in charge."

"She's a pretty bit o' baggage," said Sir John drunkenly. "If you but kiss the little slut she looks at you like a silly kitten, and, I think, with no more sense or comprehension."

Captain Watts darted an angry look at his brother-in-law but said nothing.

Lady Johnson's features were burning and her lip quivered, but she forced a laugh, saying that her husband could have judged only by hearsay, and that the Scotch girl's reputation was still very good in the country.

"Somebody'll get her," retorted Sir John, thickly, "for they're all a-pestering—Walter Butler, too, when he was here,—and your brother, and Hare and Moucher yonder. The little slut has yellow

hair, but she's too damned thin!——" he hiccoughed and upset his wine; and a servant wiped his neck-cloth and his silk and silver waistcoat while he, with wagging and unsteady head, gazed gravely down at the damage done.

Claudia set her lips to my ear: "The beast!—to affront his wife!" she whispered. "Tell me, do you, also, go about your rustic gallantries in the shameful manner of these educated and Christian gentlemen?"

"I seek no woman's destruction," said I drily.

"Not even mine?" She laughed as I reddened, and tapped me with her fan.

"If our young men do not turn this Scotch girl's head with their philandering, send her to me and I will use her kindly."

"You would not seduce her from an old and almost helpless man who needs her?" I demanded.

"I find my servants where I can in such days as these," said she coolly. "And there are plenty to care for old Douw Fonda in Caughnawaga, but only an accomplished wench like Penelope Grant would I trust to do my hair and lace me. Will you send this girl to me?"

"No, I won't," said I bluntly. "I shall not charge myself with such an errand, even for you. It is not a decent thing you ask of me or of the wench, either."

"It *is* decent," retorted Claudia pettishly. "If she's as pretty a baggage as is reported, some of our young fools will never let her alone until one among them turns her silly head. Whereas the girl would be safe with me."

"That is not my affair," I remarked.

"Do you wish her harm?"

"I tell you she is no concern of mine. And if she's not a hopeless fool she'll know how to trust the gentry of County Tryon."

"You are of them, too, Jack," she said maliciously.

"I am a plain farmer and I trouble no woman."

"You trouble me," she insisted sweetly.

I laughed, not agreeably.

"You do so," she repeated. "I would you had courage to court me again."

"Do you mean courage or inclination, Claudia?"

She gave me a melting look, very sweet, and a trifle sad.

"With patience," she murmured, "you might awaken both our hearts."

"I know well what I'd awaken in you," said I; "I'd awaken the devil. No; I've had my chance."

She sighed, still looking at me, and I awaited her further assault, grimly armed with memories.

But ere she could speak, Hiakatoo lurched to his feet and stood towering there unsteadily, his burning gaze fixed on space.

Whereat Sir John, now very tight and very drowsy, opened owlish eyes; and Hare took the Seneca by the arm.

"If you desire to go," said he, "here are three of us ready to ride beside you."

Moucher, too, stood up, and so did Captain Watts; but they were not in their cups. Watts took Hiakatoo's blanket from a servant and cast it over the tall warrior's shoulders.

"The Western Gate of the Confederacy lies unguarded," explained Hare to us all, in his frank, amiable manner. "The great Gate Keeper, Hiakatoo, bids you all farewell. Duty calls him toward the setting sun."

All had now risen from the table. Hiakatoo lurched past us and out into the hallway; Hare and Moucher and Watts took smiling leave of Sir John; the ladies gave them all a courteous farewell. Hare, passing, said to me:

"To any who enquire you can answer pat enough to make an end to foolish rumours concerning any meditated flight of this family."

"My answer," said I quietly, "is always the same: Sir William's son has given his parole."

They went out after their Indian, which disturbed me greatly, as I could not account for Hiakatoo's presence at Johnstown, and I was ill at ease seeing him so apparently in charge of three known Tories, and one of them a deputy of Guy Johnson.

However, I took my leave of Sir John, who gave me a wavering hand and stared at me blankly. Then I kissed the ladies' hands and went out to the porch where Billy waited with my mare, Kaya.

Lady Johnson came to the door as I mounted.

"Don't forget us when again you are in Johnstown," she said.

Claudia, too, appeared and stepped daintily out on the dewy grass, lifting her petticoat.

"What a witching night," she exclaimed mischievously, "—what a night for love! Do you mark the young moon, Jack, and how all the dark is saturated with a sweet smell of new buds?"

"I mark it all," said I, laughing, "and, as for love, why, I love it all, Claudia,—moon, darkness, scent of young leaves, the far forest still as death, and the noise of the brook yonder."

"I meant a sweeter love," quoth she, coming to my stirrup and laying both hands upon my saddle.

"There is no sweeter love," said I, still laughing, "—none happier than the love of this silvery world of night which God made to heal us of the blows of day."

"Whither do you ride, Jack?"

"Homeward."

"To Fonda's Bush?"

"Yes."

"Directly home?"

"I have a comrade——" said I. "He awaits me on the Mayfield Road."

"Why do you ride by Mayfield?"

"Because he waits for me there."

"Why, Jack?"

"He has friends to visit——"

"At Mayfield?"

"At Pigeon-Wood," I muttered.

"More gallantry!" she said, tossing her head. "But young men must have their fling, and I am not jealous of Betsy Browse or of her pretty sister, so that you ride not toward Caughnawaga——"

"What?"

"To see this rustic beauty, Penelope Grant——"

"Have I not refused to seek her for you?" I demanded.

"Yes, but not for yourself, Jack! Curiosity killed a cat and started a young man on his travels!"

Exasperated by her malice I struck my mare's flanks with moccasined heels; and as I rode out into the darkness Claudia's gaily mocking laugh floated after me on the still, sweet air.

CHAPTER VI

RUSTIC GALLANTRY

THERE were few lanterns and fewer candle lights in Johnstown; sober folk seemed to be already abed; only a constable, Hugh McMonts, stood in the main street, leaning upon his pike as I followed the new moon out of town and down into a dark and lovely land where all was still and fragrant and dim as the dreams of those who lie down contented with the world.

Now, as I jogged along on my mare, Kaya, over a well-levelled road, my mind was very full of what I had seen and heard at Johnson Hall.

One thing seemed clear to me; there could be no foundation for any untoward rumours regarding Sir John,—no fear that he meant to shame his honoured name and flee to Canada to join Guy Johnson and his Indians and the Tryon County Tories who already had fled.

No; Sir John was quietly planning his summer farming. All seemed tranquil at the Hall. And I could not find it in my nature to doubt his pledged word, nor believe that he was plotting mischief.

Still, it had staggered me somewhat to see Hiakatoo there in his ceremonial paint, as though the fire were still burning at Onondaga. But I concluded that the Seneca War Chief had come on some private affair and not for his nation, because a chief does not travel alone upon a ceremonial mission. No; this Indian had arrived to talk privately with Hare, who, no doubt, now represented Guy Johnson's late authority among the Johnstown Tories.

Thinking over these matters, I jogged into the Mayfield road; and as I passed in between the tall wayside bushes, without any warning at all two shadowy horsemen rode out in front of me and threw their horses across my path, blocking it.

Instantly my hand flew to my hatchet, but at that same moment one of the tall riders laughed, and I let go my war-axe, ashamed.

"It's John Drogue!" said a voice I recognized, as I pushed my

mare close to them and peered into their faces; and I discovered that these riders were two neighbors of mine, Godfrey Shew of Fish House, and Joe de Golyer of Varick's.

"What frolic is this?" I demanded, annoyed to see their big pistols resting on their thighs and their belted hatchets loosened from the fringed sheaths.

"No frolic," answered Shew soberly, "though Joe may find it a matter for his French mirth."

"Why do you stop folk at night on the King's highway?" I inquired curiously of de Golyer.

"Voyons, l'ami Jean," he replied gaily, "Sir Johnson and his Scottish bare-shanks, they have long time stop us on their sacré King's highway. Now, in our turn, we stop them, by gar! Oui, nom de dieu! And we shall see what we shall see, and we shall catch in our little trap what shall step into it, pardieu!"

Shew said in his heavy voice: "Our authorities in Albany have concluded to watch, for smuggled arms, the roads leading to Johnstown, Mr. Drogue."

"Do they fear treachery at the Hall?"

"They do not know what is going on at the Hall. But there are rumours abroad concerning the running in of arms for the Highlanders, and the constant passing of messengers between Canada and Johnstown."

"I have but left the Hall," said I. "I saw nothing to warrant suspicion." And I told them who were there and how they conducted at supper.

Shew said with an oath that Lieutenant Hare was a dangerous man, and that he hoped a warrant for him would be issued.

"As for the Indian, Hiakatoo," he went on, "he's a surly and cunning animal, and a fierce one as are all Senecas. I do not know what has brought him to Johnstown, nor why Moucher was there, nor Steve Watts."

"Young Watts, no doubt, came to visit his sister," said I. "That is natural, Mr. Shew."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," grumbled Shew. "You, Mr. Drogue, are one of those gentlemen who seem trustful of the honour of all gentlemen. And for every gentleman who *is* one, the next is a blackguard. I do not contradict you. No, sir. But we plain folk of Tryon think it wisdom to watch gentlemen like Sir John Johnson."

"I am as plain a man as you are," said I, "but I am not able to doubt the word of honour given by the son of Sir William Johnson."

De Golyer laughed and asked me which way I rode, and I told him.

"Nick Stoner also went Mayfield way," said Shew with a shrug. "I think he unsaddled at Pigeon-Wood."

They wheeled their horses into the bushes with gestures of adieu; I shook my bridle, and my mare galloped out into the sandy road again.

The sky was very bright with that sweet springtime lustre which comes not alone from the moon but also from a million million unseen stars, all a-shining behind the purple veil of night.

Presently I heard the Mayfield creek babbling like a dozen laughing lasses, and rode along the bushy banks looking up at the mountains to the north.

They are friendly little mountains which we call the Mayfield Hills, all rising into purple points against the sky, like the waves on Lake Ontario, and so tumbling northward into the grim jaws of the Adirondacks, which are different—not sinister, perhaps, but grim and stolid peaks, ever on guard along the Northern wilderness.

Long, still reaches of the creek stretched away, unstarred by rising trout because of the lateness of the night. Only a heron's croak sounded in the darkness; there were no lights where I knew the Mayfield settlement to be.

Already I saw the grist mill, with its dusky wheel motionless; and, to the left, a frame house or two and several log-houses set in cleared meadows, where the vast ramparts of the forest had been cut away.

Now, there was a mile to gallop eastward along a wet path toward Summer House Point; and in a little while I saw the long, low house called Pigeon-Wood, which sat astride o' the old Iroquois war trail to the Sacandaga and the Canadas.

It was a heavy house of hewn timber and smoothed with our blue clay, which cuts the sandy loam of Tryon in great streaks.

There was no light in the windows, but the milky lustre of the heavens flooded all, and there, upon the rail fence, I did see Nick Stoner a-kissing of Betsy Browse.

They heard my horse and fluttered down from the fence like two robins, as I pulled up and dismounted.

"Hush!" said the girl, who was bare of feet and her gingham scarce pinned decently; and laid her finger on her lips as she glanced toward the house.

"The old man is back," quoth Nick, sliding a graceless arm around her. "But he sleeps like an ox." And, to Betsy, "Whistle

thy little sister from her nest, sweetheart. For there are no gallants in Tryon to match with my comrade, John Drogue!"

Which did not please me to hear, for I had small mind for rustic gallantry; but Martha pursed her lips and whistled thrice; and presently the house door opened without any noise.

She was a healthy, glowing wench, half confident, half coquette, like a playful forest thing in springtime, when all things mate.

And her sister, Jessica, was like her, only slimmer, who came across the starlit grass rubbing both eyes with her little fists, like a child roused from sleep,—a shy, smiling, red-lipped thing, who gave me her hand and yawned.

And presently went to where my mare stood to pet her and pull the new, wet grass and feed her tid-bits.

I did not feel awkward, yet knew not how to conduct or what might be expected of me at this star-dim rendezvous with a sleepy, woodland beauty.

But she seemed in nowise disconcerted after a word or two; drew my arm about her; put up her red mouth to be kissed, and then begged to be lifted to my saddle.

Here she sat astride and laughed down at me through her tangled hair. And:

"I have a mind to gallop to Fish House," said she, "only that it might prove a lonely jaunt."

"Shall I come, Jessica?"

"Will you do so?"

I waited till the blood cooled in my veins; and by that time she had forgotten what she had been about—like any other forest bird.

"You have a fine mare, Mr. Drogue," said she, gently caressing Kaya with her naked heels. "No rider better mounted passes Pigeon-Wood."

"Do many riders pass, Jessica?"

"Sir John's company between Fish House and the Hall."

"Any others lately?"

"Yes, there are horsemen who ride swiftly at night. We hear them."

"Who may they be?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Sir John's people?"

"Very like."

"Coming from the North?"

"Yes, from the North."

"Have they waggons to escort?"

"I have heard waggons, too."

"Lately?"

"Yes." She leaned down from the saddle and rested both hands on my shoulders:

"Have you no better way to please than in catechizing me, John Drogue?" she laughed. "Do you know what lips were fashioned for except words?"

I kissed her, and, still resting her hands on my shoulders, she looked down into my eyes.

"Are you of Sir John's people?" she asked.

"Of them, perhaps, but not now with them, Jessica."

"Oh. The other party?"

"Yes."

"You! A Boston man?"

"Nick and I, both."

"Why?"

"Because we design to live as free as God made us, and not as king-fashioned slaves."

"Oh, la!" quoth she, opening her eyes wide, "you use very mighty words to me, Mr. Drogue. There are young men in red coats and gilt lace on their hats who would call you rebel."

"I am."

"No," she whispered, putting both arms around my neck. "You are a pretty boy and no Yankee! I do not wish you to be a Boston rebel."

"Are all your lovers King's men?"

"My lovers?"

"Yes."

"Are you one?"

At which I laughed and lifted the saucy wench from my saddle, and stood so in the starlight, her arms still around my neck.

"No," said I, "I never had a sweetheart, and, indeed, would not know how to conduct——"

"We could learn."

But I only laughed, disengaging her arms, and passing my own around her supple waist.

"Listen," said I, "Nick and I mean no harm in a starlit frolic, where we tarry for a kiss from a pretty maid."

"No harm?"

"Neither that nor better, Jessica. Nor do you; and I know that very well. With me it's a laugh and a kiss and a laugh; and into my stirrups and off. . . . And you are young and soft and sweet

as new maple-sap in the snow. But if you dream like other little birds, of nesting——"

"May a lass not dream in springtime?"

"Surely. But let it end so, too."

"In dreams."

"It is wiser."

"There is no wisdom in me, pretty boy in buckskin. And I love thrums better than red-coats and lace."

"Love spinning better than either!"

"Oh, la! He preaches of wheels and spindles when my mouth aches for a kiss!"

"And mine," said I, "—but my legs ache more for my saddle; and I must go."

At that moment when I said adieu with my lips, and she did not mean to unlink her arms, came Nick on noiseless tread to twitch my arm. And, "Look," said he, pointing toward the long, low rampart of Maxon Ridge.

I turned, my hand still retaining Jessica's: and saw the Iroquois signal-flame mount thin and high, tremble, burn red against the stars, then die there in the darkness.

Northward another flame reddened on the hills, then another, fire answering fire.

"What the devil is this?" growled Nick. "These are no times for Indians to talk to one another with fire."

"Get into your saddle," said I, "and we shall ride by Varick's, for I've a mind to see what will-o'-the-wisps may be a-dancing over the great Vlaie!"

So the tall lad took his leave of his little pigeon of Pigeon-Wood, who seemed far from willing to let him loose; and I made my adieux to Jessica, who stood a-pouting; and we mounted and set off at a gallop for Varick's, by way of Summer House Point.

I could not be certain, but it seemed to me that there was a light at the Point, which came through the crescents from behind closed shutters; but that was within reason, Sir John being at liberty to keep open the hunting lodge if he chose.

As for the Drowned Lands, as far as we could see through the night there was not a spark over that desolate wilderness.

The Mohawk fires on the hills, too, had died out. Fish House, if still burning candles, was too far away to see; we galloped through Varick's, past the mill where, from its rocky walls, Frenchman's Creek roared under the stars; then turned west along the Brent-Meester's trail toward Fonda's Bush and home.

"Those Iroquois fires trouble me mightily," quoth Nick, pushing his lank horse forward beside my mare.

"And me," said I.

"Why should they talk with fire on the night Hiakatoo comes to the Hall?"

"I do not know," said I. "But when I am home I shall write it in a letter to Albany that this night the Mohawks have talked among themselves with fire, and that a Seneca was present."

"And that mealy-mouthed Ensign, Moucher; and Hare and Steve Watts!"

"I shall so write it," said I, very seriously.

"Good!" cried he with a jolly slap on his horse's neck. "But the sweeter part of this night's frolic you and I shall carry locked in our breasts. Eh, John? By heaven, is she not fresh and pink as a dewy strawberry in June—my pretty little wench? Is she not apt as a school-learned lass with any new lesson a man chooses to teach?"

"Yes, too apt, perhaps," said I, shaking my head but laughing. "But I think they have had already a lesson or two in such frolics, less innocent, perhaps, than the lesson we gave."

"I'll break the back of any red-coat who stops at Pigeon-Wood!" cried Nick Stoner with an oath. "Yes, red-coat or any other colour, either!"

"You would not take our frolic seriously, would you, Nick?"

"I take all frolics seriously," said he with a gay laugh, smiting both thighs, and his bridle loose. "Where I place my mark with my proper lips, let roving gallants read and all roysterers beware! —even though I so mark a dozen pretty does!"

"A very Turk," said I.

"An antlered stag in the blue-coat that brooks no other near his herd!" cried he with a burst of laughter. And fell to smiting his thighs and tossing up both arms, riding like a very centaur there, with his hair flowing and his thrums streaming in the starlight.

And, "Lord God of Battles!" he cried out to the stars, stretching up his powerful young arms. "Thou knowest how I could love tonight; but dost Thou know, also, how I could fight if I had only a foe to destroy with these two empty hands!"

"Thou murderous Turk!" I cried in his ear. "Pray, rather, that there shall be no war, and no foe more deadly than the pretty wench of Pigeon-Wood!"

"Love or war, I care not!" he shouted in his springtide frenzy, galloping there unbridled, his lean young face in the wind. "But

God send the one or the other to me very quickly—or love or war —for I need more than a plow or axe to content my soul afire!"

"Idiot!" said I, "have done a-yelling! You wake every owl in the bush!"

And above his youth-maddened laughter I heard the weird yelping of the forest owls as though the Six Nations already were in their paint, and blood fouled every trail.

So we galloped into Fonda's Bush, pulling up before my door; but Nick would not stay the night and must needs gallop on to his own log house, where he could blanket and stall his tired and sweating horse—I owning only the one warm stall.

"Well," says he, still slapping his thighs where he sat his saddle as I dismounted, and his young face still aglow in the dim, silvery light, "—well, John, I shall ride again, one day, to Pigeon-Wood. Will you ride with me?"

"I think not."

"And why?"

But, standing by my door, bridle in hand, I slowly shook my head.

"There is no prettier bit o' baggage in County Tryon than Jessica Browse," he insisted—"unless, perhaps, it be that Scotch girl at Caughnawaga, whom all the red-coats buzz about like sap flies around a pan."

"And who may this Scotch lassie be?" I asked with a smile, and busy, now, unsaddling.

"I mean the new servant to old Douw Fonda."

"I have not noticed her."

"You have not seen the Caughnawaga girl?"

"No. I remain incurious concerning servants," said I, drily.

"Is it so!" he laughed. "Well, then,—for all that they have a right to gold binding on their hats,—the gay youth of Johnstown, yes, and of Schenectady, too, have not remained indifferent to the Scotch girl of Douw Fonda, Penelope Grant!"

I shrugged and lifted my saddle.

"Every man to his taste," said I. "Some eat woodchucks, some porcupines, and others the tail of a beaver. Venison smacks sweeter to me."

Nick laughed again. "When she reads the old man to sleep and takes her knitting to the porch, you should see the ring of gallants every afternoon a-courting her!—and their horses tied to every tree around the house as at a quilting!

"But there's no quilting frolic; no supper; no dance;—nothing

more than a yellow-haired slip of a wench busy knitting there in the sun, and looking at none o' them but intent on her needles and with that faint smile she wears——"

"Go court her," said I, laughing; and led my mare into her warm stall.

"You'll court her yourself, one day!" he shouted after me, as he gathered bridle. "And if you do, God help you, John Drogue, for they say she's a born disturber of quiet men's minds, and mistress of a very mischievous and deadly art!"

"What art?" I laughed.

"The art o' love!" he bawled as he rode off, slapping his thighs and setting the moonlit woods all a-ringing with his laughter.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE THE STORM

JOHNNY SILVER had ridden my mare to Varick's to be shod, the evening previous, and was to remain the night and return by noon to Fonda's Bush.

It was the first sunny May day of the year, murmurous with bees, and a sweet, warm smell from woods and cleared lands.

Already bluebirds were drifting from stump to stump, and robins, which had arrived in April before the snow melted, chirped in the furrows of last autumn's plowing.

Also were flying those frail little grass-green moths, earliest harbingers of vernal weather, so that observing folk, versed in the pretty signals which nature displays to acquaint us of her designs, might safely prophesy soft skies.

I was standing in my glebe just after sunrise, gazing across my great cleared field—I had but one then, all else being woods—and I was thinking about my crops, how that here should be sown buckwheat to break and mellow last year's sod; and here I should plant corn and Indian squashes, and yonder, God willing, potatoes and beans.

And I remember, now, that I presently fell to whistling the air of "The Little Red Foot," while I considered my future harvest; and was even planning to hire of Andrew Bowman his fine span of white oxen for my spring plowing; when, of a sudden, through the May woods there grew upon the air a trembling sound, distant and sad. Now it sounded louder as the breeze stirred; now fainter when it shifted, so that a mournful echo only throbbed in my ears.

It was the sound of the iron bell ringing on the new Block House at Mayfield.

The carelessly whistled tune died upon my lips; my heart almost ceased for a moment, then violently beat the alarm.

I ran to a hemlock stump in the field, where my loaded rifle rested, and took it up and looked at the priming powder, finding it dry and bright.

A strange stillness had fallen upon the forest; there was no

sound save that creeping and melancholy quaver of the bell. The birds had become quiet; the breeze, too, died away; and it was as though each huge tree stood listening, and that no leaf dared stir.

As a dark cloud gliding between earth and sun quenches the sky's calm brightness, so the bell's tolling seemed to transform the scene about me to a sunless waste, through which the dread sound surged in waves, like the complaint of trees before a storm.

Standing where my potatoes had been hoed the year before, I listened a moment longer to the dreary mourning of the bell, my eyes roving along the edges of the forest which, like a high, green rampart, enclosed my cleared land on every side.

Then I turned and went swiftly to my house, snatched blanket from bed, spread it on the puncheon floor, laid upon it a sack of new bullets, a new canister of powder, a heap of buckskin scraps for wadding, a bag of salt, another of parched corn, a dozen strips of smoked venison.

Separately on the blanket beside these I placed two pair of woollen hose, two pair of new ankle moccasins, an extra pair of deer-skin leggins, two cotton shirts, a hunting shirt of doe-skin, and a fishing line and hooks. These things I rolled within my blanket, making of everything a strapped pack.

Then I pulled on my District Militia regimentals, which same was a hunting shirt of tow-cloth, spatter-dashes of the same, and a felt hat, cocked.

Across the breast of my tow-cloth hunting-shirt I slung a bullet-pouch, a powder-horn and a leather haversack; seized my light hatchet and hung it to my belt, hoisted the blanket pack to my shoulders and strapped it there; and, picking up rifle and hunting knife, I passed swiftly out of the house, fastening the heavy oaken door behind me and wondering whether I should ever return to open it again.

The trodden forest trail, wide enough for a team to pass, lay straight before me due west, through heavy woods, to Andrew Bowman's farm.

When I came into the cleared land, I perceived Mrs. Bowman washing clothing in a spring near the door of her log house, and the wash a-bleaching in the early sun. When she saw me she called to me across the clearing:

"Have you news for me, John Drogue?"

"None," said I. "Where is your man, Martha?"

"Gone away to Stoner's with pack and rifle. He is but just

departed. Is it only a drill call, or are the Indians out at the Lower Castle?"

"I know nothing," said I. "Are you alone in the house?"

"A young kinswoman, Penelope Grant, servant to old Douw Fonda, arrived late last night with my man from Caughnawaga, and is still asleep in the loft."

As she spoke a girl, clothed only in her shift, came to the open door of the log house. Her naked feet were snow-white; her hair, yellow as October-corn, seemed very thick and tangled.

She stood blinking as though dazzled, the glory of the rising sun in her face; then the tolling of the tocsin swam to her sleepy ears, and she started like a wild thing when a shot is fired very far away.

And, "What is that sound?" she exclaimed, staring about her; and I had never seen a woman's eyes so brown under such yellow hair.

She stepped out into the fresh grass and stood in the dew listening, now gazing at the woods, now at Martha Bowman, and now upon me.

Speech came to me with an odd sort of anger. I said to Mrs. Bowman, who stood gaping in the sunshine:

"Where are your wits? Take that child into the house and bar your shutters and draw water for your tubs. And keep your door bolted until some of the militia can return from Stoner's."

"Oh, my God," said she, and fell to snatching her wash from the bushes and grass.

At that, the girl Penelope turned and looked at me. And I thought she was badly frightened until she spoke.

"Young soldier," said she, "do you know if Sir John has fled?"

"I know nothing," said I, "and am like to learn less if you women do not instantly go in and bar your house."

"Are the Mohawks out?" she asked.

"Have I not said I do not know?"

"Yes, sir. . . . But I should have escort by the shortest route to Cayadutta——"

"You talk like a child," said I, sharply. "And you seem scarcely more," I added, turning away. But I lingered still to see them safely bolted in before I departed.

"Soldier," she began timidly; but I interrupted:

"Go fill your tubs against fire-arrows," said I. "Why do you loiter?"

"Because I have great need to return to Caughnawaga. Will you guide me the shortest way by the woods?"

"Do you not hear that bell?" I demanded angrily.

"Yes, sir, I hear it. But I should go to Cayadutta——"

"And I should answer that militia call," said I impatiently. "Go in and lock the house, I tell you!"

Mrs. Bowman, her arms full of wet linen, ran into the house. The girl, Penelope, gazed at the woods.

"I am servant to a very old man," she said, twisting her linked fingers. "I can not abandon him! I can not let him remain all alone at Cayadutta Lodge. Will you take me to him?"

"And if I were free of duty," said I, "I would not take you or any other woman into those accursed woods!"

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I do not yet comprehend what that bell is telling me. And if it means that there is a painted war-party out between the Sacandaga and the Mohawk, I shall not take you to Caughnawaga when I return from Stoner's, and that's flat!"

"I am not afraid to go," said she. But I think I saw her shudder; and her face seemed very still and white. Then Mrs. Bowman ran out of the house and caught the girl by her homespun shift.

"Come indoors!" she cried shrilly, "or will you have us all pulling war arrows out of our bodies while you stand blinking at the woods and gossiping with Jack Drogue?"

The girl shook herself free, and asked me again to take her to Cayadutta Lodge.

But I had no more time to argue, and I flung my rifle to my shoulder and started out across the cleared land.

Once I looked back. And I saw her still standing there, the rising sun bright on her tangled hair, and her naked feet shining like silver in the dew-wet grass.

By a spring path I hastened to the house of John Putman, and found him already gone and his family drawing water and fastening shutters.

His wife, Deborah, called to me saying that the Salisburys should be warned, and I told her that I had already spoken to the Bowmans.

"Your labour for your pains, John Drogue!" cried she. "The Bowmans are King's people and need fear neither Tory nor Indian!"

"It is unjust to say so, Deborah," I retorted warmly. "Dries Bowman is already on his way to answer the militia call!"

"Watch him!" she said, slamming the shutters; and fell to

scolding her children, who, poor things, were striving at the well with dripping bucket too heavy for their strength.

So I drew the water they might need if, indeed, it should prove true that Little Abe's Mohawks at the Lower Castle had painted themselves and were broken loose; and then I ran back along the spring path to the Salisbury's, and found them already well bolted in, and their man gone to Stoner's with rifle and pack.

And now comes Johnny Silver, who had ridden my mare from Varick's, but had no news, all being tranquil along Frenchman's Creek, and nobody able to say what the Block House bell was telling us.

"Did you stable Kaya?" I asked.

"Oui, mon garce! I have bolt her in tight!"

"Good heavens," said I, "she can not remain bolted in to starve if I am sent on to Canada! Get you forward to Stoner's house and say that I delay only to fetch my horse!"

The stout little French trapper flung his piece to his shoulder and broke into a dog-trot toward the west.

"Follow quickly, Sieur Jean!" he called gaily. "By gar, I have smell Iroquois war paint since ver' long time already, and now I smell him strong as old dog fox!"

I turned and started back through the woods as swiftly as I could stride.

As I came in sight of my log house, I was astounded to see my mare out and saddled, and a woman setting foot to stirrup. As I sprang out of the edge of the woods and ran toward her, she wheeled Kaya, and I saw that it was the Caughnawaga wench in *my* saddle and upon *my* horse—her yellow hair twisted up and shining like a Turk's gold turban above her bloodless face.

"What do you mean!" I cried in a fury. "Dismount instantly from that mare! Do you hear me?"

"I must ride to Caughnawaga!" she called out, and struck my mare with both heels so that the horse bounded away beyond my reach.

Exasperated, I knew not what to do, for I could not hope to overtake the mad wench afoot; and so could only shout after her.

However, she drew bridle and looked back; but I dared not advance from where I stood, lest she gallop out o' hearing at the first step.

"This is madness!" I called to her across the field. "You do not know why that bell is ringing at Mayfield. A week since the Mohawks were talking to one another with fires on all these

hills! There may be a war party in yonder woods! There may be more than one betwixt here and Caughnawaga!"

"I cannot desert Mr. Fonda at such a time," said she with that same pale and frightened obstinacy I had encountered at Bowman's.

"Do you wish to steal my horse!" I demanded.

"No, sir. . . . It is not meant so. If some one would guide me afoot I would be glad to return to you your horse."

"Oh. And if not, then you mean to ride there in spite o' the devil. Is that the situation?"

"Yes, sir."

Had it been any man I would have put a bullet in him; and could have easily marked him where I pleased. Never had I been in colder rage; never had I felt so helpless. And every moment I was afeard the crazy girl would ride on.

"Will you parley?" I shouted.

"Parley?" she repeated. "How so, young soldier?"

"In this manner, then: I engage my honour not to seize your bridle or touch you or my horse if you will sit still till I come up with you."

She sat looking at me across the fallow field in silence.

"I shall not use violence," said I. "I shall try only to find some way to serve you, and yet to do my own duty, too."

"Soldier," she replied in a troubled voice, "is this the very truth you speak?"

"Have I not engaged my honour?" I retorted sharply.

She made no reply, but she did not stir as I advanced, though her brown eyes watched my every step.

When I stood at her stirrup she looked down at me intently, and I saw she was younger even than I had thought, and was made more like a smooth, slim boy than a woman.

"You are Penelope Grant, of Caughnawaga," I said.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir."

I named myself, saying with a smile that none of my name had ever broken faith in word or deed.

"Now," I continued, "that bell calls me to duty as surely as drum or trumpet ever summoned soldier since there were wars on earth. I must go to Stoner's; I can not guide you to Caughnawaga through the woods or take you thither by road or trail. And yet, if I do not, you mean to take my horse."

"I must."

"And risk a Mohawk war party on the way?"

"I—must."

"That is very brave," said I, curbing my impatience, "but not wise. There are others of his kin to care for old Douw Fonda if war has truly come upon us here in Tryon County."

"Soldier," said she in her still voice, which I once thought had been made strange by fear, but now knew otherwise—"my honour, too, is engaged. Mr. Fonda, whom I serve, has made of me more than a servant. He uses me as a daughter; offers to adopt me; trusts his age and feebleness to me; looks to me for every need, every ministration. . . .

"Soldier, I came to Dries Bowman's last night with his consent, and gave him my word to return within a week. I came to Fonda's Bush because Mr. Fonda desired me to visit the only family in America with whom I have the slightest tie of kinship—the Bowmans.

"But if war has come to us here in County Tryon, then instantly my duty is to this brave old gentleman who lives all alone in his house at Caughnawaga, and nobody except servants and black slaves to protect him if danger comes to the door."

What the girl said touched me; nor could I discern in her anything of the coquetry which Nick Stoner's story of her knitting and her ring of gallants had pictured for me.

Surely here was no rustic coquette to be flattered and courted and bedeviled by her betters—no country suck-thumb to sit a-giggling at her knitting, surfeited with honeyed words that meant destruction;—no wench to hang her head and twiddle apron while some pup of quality whispered in her ear temptations.

I said: "This is the better way. Listen. Ride my mare to Mayfield by the highway. If you learn there that the Lower Castle Indians have painted for war, there is no hope of winning through to Cayadutta Lodge. And of what use to Mr. Fonda would be a dead girl?"

"That is true," she whispered.

"Very well. And if the Mohawks are loose along the river then you shall remain at the Block House until it becomes possible to go on. There is no other way. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you engage to do this thing? And to place my horse in safety at the Mayfield fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then," said I, "in my turn I promise to send aid to you at Mayfield, or come myself and take you to Cayadutta Lodge at

soon as that proves possible. And I promise more; I shall endeavour to get word through to Mr. Fonda concerning your situation."

She thanked me in that odd, still voice of hers. Her eyes had the starry look of a child's—or of unshed tears.

"My mare will carry two," said I cheerfully. "Let me mount behind you and set you on the Mayfield road."

She made no reply. I mounted behind her, took the bridle from her chilled fingers, and spoke to Kaya very gaily. And so we rode across my sunlit glebe and across the sugar-bush, where the moist trail, full of ferns, stretched away toward Mayfield as straight as the bee flies.

I do not know whether it was because the wench was now fulfilling her duty, as she deemed it, and therefore had become contented in a measure, but when I dismounted she took the bridle with a glance that seemed near to a faint smile. But maybe it was her mouth that I thought fashioned in pleasant lines.

"Will you remember, soldier?" she asked, looking down at me from the saddle. "I shall wait some news of you at the Mayfield fort."

"I shall not let you remain there long abandoned," said I cheerily. "Be kind to Kaya. She has a tender mouth and an ear more sensitive still to a harsh word."

The girl laid a hand flat on my mare's neck and looked at me, the shy caress in her gesture and in her eyes.

Both were meant for my horse; and a quick kindness for this Scotch girl came into my heart.

"Take shelter at the Mayfield fort," said I, "and be very certain I shall not forget you. You may gallop all the way on this soft wood-road. Will you care for Kaya at the fort when she is unsaddled?"

A smile suddenly curved her lips.

"Yes, John Drogue," she answered, looking me in the eyes. And the next moment she was off at a gallop, her yellow hair loosened with the first bound of the horse, and flying all about her face and shoulders now, like sunshine flashing across wind-blown goldenrod.

Then, in her saddle, the girl turned and looked back at me, and sat so, still galloping, until she was out of sight.

And, as I stood there alone in the woodland road, I began to understand what Nick Stoner meant when he called this Scotch girl a disturber of men's minds and a mistress—all unconscious, perhaps—of a very deadly art.

CHAPTER VIII

SHEEP AND GOATS

NOW, as I came again to the forest's edge and hastened along the wide logging road, to make up for moments wasted, I caught sight of two neighbors, John Putman and Herman Salisbury, walking ahead of me.

They wore the regimentals of our Mohawk Regiment of district militia, carried rifles and packs; and I smelled the tobacco from their pipes, which seemed pleasant though I had never learned to smoke.

I called to them; they heard me and waited.

"Well, John," says Putman, as I came up with them, "this is like to be a sorry business for farmers, what with plowing scarce begun and not a seed yet planted in all the Northland, barring winter wheat."

"You think we are to take the field in earnest this time?" I asked anxiously.

"It looks that way to me, Mr. Drogue. It's a long, long road to liberty, lad; and I'm thinking we're off at last."

"He believes," explained Salisbury, "that Little Abraham's Mohawks are leaving the Lower Castle—which God prevent!—but I think this business is liker to be some new deviltry of Sir John's."

"Sir John gave his parole to General Schuyler," said I, turning very red; for I was mortified that the honour of my caste should be so carelessly questioned.

"It is not unthinkable that Sir John might lie," retorted Salisbury bluntly. "I knew his father. Well and good. I know the son, also. . . . But I suppose that gentlemen like yourself, Mr. Drogue, are ashamed to suspect the honour of any of their own class,—even an enemy."

But Putman was plainer spoken, saying that in his opinion any Tory was likely to attempt any business, however dirty, and rub up his tarnished honour afterward.

I made him no answer; and we marched swiftly forward, each engaged with a multitude of serious and sombre thoughts.

A few moments later, chancing to glance behind me, stirred by what instinct I know not, I espied two neighbors, young John, son of Philip Helmer, and Charles Cady, of Fonda's Bush, following us so stealthily and so closely that they might decently have hailed us had they been so minded.

Now, when they perceived that I had noticed them, they dodged into the bush, as though moved by some common impulse. Then they reappeared in the road. And, said I in a low voice to John Putman:

"Yonder comes slinking a proper pair o' tree-cats to sniff us to our destination. If these two be truly of the other party, then they have no business at John Stoner's."

Putman and Salisbury both looked back. Said the one, grimly: "They are not coming to answer the militia call; they have rifles but neither regimentals nor packs."

Said the other: "I wish we were clean split at Fonda's Bush, so that an honest man might know when 'neighbor' spells 'traitor' in low Dutch."

"Some riddles are best solved by bullets," muttered the other. "Who argues with wolves or plays cat's-cradle with catamounts!"

Glancing again over my shoulder, I saw that the two behind us were mending their pace and must soon come up with us. And so they did, Putman giving them a civil good-day.

"Have you any news, John Drogue?" inquired young Helmer.

I replied that I had none to share with him, meaning only that I had no news at all. But Cady took it otherwise and his flat-featured face reddened violently, as though the pox were coming out on him.

And, "What the devil," says he, "does this young, forest-running cockerel mean? And why should he not share his news with John Helmer here,—yes, or with me, too, by God, or yet with any true man in County Tryon?"

I said that I had not intended any such meaning; that he mistook me; and that I had aimed at no discourtesy to anybody.

"And safer for you, too!" retorted Cady in a loud and threatening tone. "A boy's wisdom lies in his silence."

"Johnny Helmer asked a question of me," said I quietly. "I replied as best I knew how."

"Yes, and I'll ask a dozen questions if I like!" shouted Cady. "Don't think to bully me or cast aspersions on my political complexion!"

"If," said I, "your political complexion be no clearer than your

natural one, God only can tell what ferments under your skin."

At which he seemed so taken aback that he answered nothing; but Helmer urgently demanded to know what political views I pretended to carry.

"I wear mine on my back," said I pleasantly, glancing around at both Helmer and Cady, who bore no packs on their backs in earnest of their readiness for service.

"You are a damned impudent boy!" retorted Cady, "whatever may be your politics or your complexion."

Salisbury and Putman looked around at him in troubled silence, and he said no more for the moment. But Helmer's handsome features darkened again: and, "I'll not be put upon," said he, "whatever Charlie Cady stomachs! Who is Jack Drogue to flaunt his pack and his politics under my nose!

"And," he added, looking angrily at me, "by every natural right a gentleman should be a King's man. So if your politics stink somewhat of Boston, you are doubly suspect as an ingrate to the one side and a favour-currying servant to the other!"

I said: "Had Sir William lived to see this day in Tryon, I think he, also, would be wearing his regimentals as I do, and to the same purpose."

Cady burst into a jeering laugh: "Say as much to Sir John! Go to the Hall and say to Sir John that his father, had he lived, would this day be sending out a district militia call! Tell him that, young cockerel, if you desire a flogging at the guard-house."

"You know more of floggings than do I," said I quietly. Which stopt his mouth. For, despite my scarcity of years, I had given him a sound beating the year before, being so harassed and pestered by him because I had answered the militia-call on the day that General Schuyler marched up and disarmed Sir John's Highlanders at the Hall.

Putman, beside whom I was marching, turned to me and said, loud enough for all to hear: "You are only a lad, John Drogue, but I bear witness that you display the patience and good temper of a grown man. For if Charlie Cady, here, had picked on me as he has on you, he sure had tasted my rifle-butt before now!"

"Neighbors must bear with one another in such times," said I, "and help each other stamp down the earth where the war-axe lies buried."

And, "Damn you!" shouts Cady at a halt, "I shall not stir a step more to be insulted. I shall not budge one inch, bell or no bell, call or no call!——"

But Helmer dropped to the rear and got him by the elbow and pulled him forward; and I heard them whispering together behind us as we hastened on.

Herman Salisbury said: "A pair of real tree-cats, old Tom and little Kit! I'm in half a mind to turn them back!" And he swung his brown rifle from the shoulder and let it drop to the hollow of his left arm—an insult and a menace to any man.

"They but answer their nature, which is to nose about and smell out what's a-frying," growled Putman. "Shall we turn them back and be done with them? It will mean civil war in Fonda's Bush."

"Watched hens never lay," said I. "Let them come with us. While they remain under our eyes the stale old plan they brood will addle like a cluck-egg."

Salisbury nodded meaningly:

"So that I can see my enemy," growled he, "I have no care concerning him. But let him out o' sight and I fret like a chained beagle."

As he finished speaking we came into Stoner's clearing, which was but a thicket of dead weed-stalks in a fallow field fenced by split rails. Fallow, indeed, lay all the Stoner clearing, save for a patch o' hen-scratched garden at the log-cabin's dooryard; for old Henry Stoner and his forest-running sons were none too fond of dallying with plow and hoe while rifle and fish-pole rested across the stag-horn's crotch above the chimney-piece.

And if ever they fed upon anything other than fish and flesh, I do not know; for I never saw aught growing in their garden, save a dozen potato-vines and a stray corn-stalk full o' worms.

Around the log house in the clearing already were gathered a dozen or sixteen men, the greater number wearing the tow-cloth rifle-frock of the district militia.

Other men began to arrive as we came up. Everywhere great, sinewy hands were extended to greet us; old Henry Stoner, sprawling under an apple tree, saluted us with a harsh pleasantry; and I saw the gold rings shining in his ears.

Nick came over to where I stood, full of that devil's humour which so often urged him into—and led him safely out of—endless scrapes betwixt sun-up and moon-set every day in the year.

"It's Sir John we're to take, I hear," he said to me with a grin. "They say the lying louse of a Baronet has been secretly plotting with Guy Johnson and the Butlers in Canada. What wonder, then, that our Provincial Congress has its belly full of these same Johnstown Tories and must presently spew them up. And

they say we are to march on the Hall at noon and hustle our merry Baronet into Johnstown jail."

I felt myself turning red.

"Is it not decent to give Sir John the benefit of doubt until we learn why that bell is ringing?" said I.

"There we go!" cried Nick Stoner. "Just because your father loved Sir William and you may wear gold lace on your hat, you feel an attachment to all quality. Hearken to me, John Drogue: Sir William is dead and the others are as honourable as a pack of Canada wolves." He climbed to the top of the rickety rail fence and squatted there. "The landed gentry of Tryon County are a pack of bloody wolves," said he, lighting his cob pipe;—"Guy Johnson, Colonel Claus, Walter Butler, every one of them —every one!—only excepting you, John Drogue! Look, now, where they're gathering in the Canadas—Johnsons, Butlers, McDonalds,—the whole Tory pack—with Brant and his Mohawks stole away, and Little Abraham like to follow with every warrior from the Lower Castle!

"And do you suppose that Sir John has no interest in all this Tory treachery? Do you suppose that this poisonous Baronet is not in constant and secret communication with Canada?"

I looked elsewhere sullenly. Nick took me by the arm and drew me up to a seat beside him on the rail fence.

"Let's view it soberly and fairly, Jack," says he, tapping his palm with the stem of his pipe, through which smoke oozed. "Let's view it from the start. Begin from the Boston business. Now, then! George the Virginian got the Red-coats cooped up in Boston. That's the Yankee answer to too much British tyranny.

"We, in the Northland, looked to our landed gentry to stand by us, lead us, and face the British King who aims to turn us into slaves.

"We called on our own governing class to protect us in our ancient liberties,—to arm us, lead us in our own defense! We begged Guy Johnson to hold back his savages so that the Iroquois Confederacy should remain passive and take neither the one side nor t'other.

"I grant you that Sir William in his day did loyally his uttermost to quiet the Iroquois and hold his own Mohawks tranquil when Cresap was betrayed by Dunmore, and the first breeze from this storm which is now upon us was already stirring the Six Nations into restlessness."

"Sir William," said I, "was the greatest and the best of all Americans."

He said gravely: "Sir William is dead. May God rest his soul. But this is the situation that confronts us here this day on the frontier: We appealed to the landed gentry of Tryon. They sneered at us, and spoke of us as rebels, and have used us very scornfully—all excepting yourself, John!

"They forced Alec White on us as Sheriff, and he broke up our meetings. They strove by colour of law and by illegal force to stamp out in Tryon County the last spark of liberty, of manhood among us. God knows what we have endured these last few years from the landed gentry of Tryon!—what we have put up with and stomached since the first shot was fired at Lexington!

"And what has become of our natural protectors and leaders? Where is the landed gentry of County Tryon at this very hour? Except you, John Drogue, where are our gentlemen of the Northland?"

"Gone," said I soberly.

"Gone to Canada with the murderous Indians they were supposed to hold neutral! Guy Park stands empty and locked. It is an accursed place! Guy Johnson is fled with every Tory desperado and every Indian he could muster! May God damn him!

"Old John Butler followed; and is brigading malcontents in Canada. Butlersbury stands deserted. May every devil in hell haunt that house! Young Walter Butler is gone with many of our old neighbors of Tryon; and at Niagara he is forming a merciless legion to return and cut our throats.

"And Colonel Claus is gone, and McDonald, the bloody thief! —with his kilted lunatics and all his Scotch banditti——"

"But Sir John remains," said I quietly.

"Jack! Are you truly so blinded by your caste! Did not you yourself answer the militia call last winter and march with our good General to disarm Sir John's popish Highlanders! And even then they lied—and Sir John lied—for they hid their broadswords and pikes! and delivered them not when they paraded to ground their muskets!"

"Sir John has given his parole," I repeated stubbornly.

"Sir John breaks it every hour of the day!" cried Nick. "And he will break it again when we march to take him. Do you think he won't learn of our coming? Do you suppose he will stay at the Hall, which he has pledged his honour to do?"

"His lady is still there."

"With his lady I have no quarrel," rejoined Nick. "I know her to be a very young, very wilful, very bitter, and very unhappy Tory; and she treats us plain folk like dirt under her satin shoon. But for that I care nothing. I pity her because she is the wife of that cold, sleek beast, Sir John. I pity her because she is gently bred and frail and lonely and stuffed with childish pride o' race. I pity her lot there in the great Hall, with her girl companions and her servants and her slaves. And I pity her because everybody in County Tryon, excepting only herself, knows that Sir John cares nothing for her, and that Claire Putnam of Tribes Hill is Sir John's doxy!—and be damned to him! And you think such a man will not break his word?

"He broke his vows to wife and mistress alike. Why should he keep his vows to men?" He slid to the ground as he spoke, and I followed, for our three drummers had formed rank and were drawing their sticks from their cross-belts. Our fifers, also, lined up behind them; and Nick and his young brother, John, took places with them.

"Fall in! Fall in!" cried Joe Scott, our captain; and everybody ran with their packs and rifles to form in double ranks of sixteen files front while the drums rolled like spring thunder, filling the woods with their hollow sound, and the fifes shrilled like the swish of rain through trees.

Standing at ease between Dries Bowman and Baltus Weed, I answered to the roll call. Some among us lighted pipes and leaned on our long rifles, chatting with neighbors; others tightened belts and straps, buttoned spatter-dashes, or placed a sprig of hemlock above the black and white cockades on their felt hats.

Balty Weed, who lived east of me, a thin fellow with red rims to his eyes and dry, sparse hair tied in a queue with a knot of buckskin, asked me in his stealthy way what I thought about our present business, and if our Provincial Congress had not, perhaps, unjustly misjudged Sir John.

I replied cautiously. I had never trusted Balty because he frequented taverns where few friends to liberty cared to assemble; and he was far too thick with Philip and John Helmer and with Charlie Cady to suit my taste.

We, in the little hamlet of Fonda's Bush, were scarce thirty families, all counted; and yet, even here in this trackless wilderness, out of which each man had hewed for himself a patch of garden and a stump pasture along the little river Kennyetto,

the bitter quarrel had long smouldered betwixt Tory and Patriot —King's man and so-called Rebel.

And this was the Mohawk country. And the Mohawks stood for the King of England.

The road, I say, ended here; but there was a Mohawk path through twenty odd miles of untouched forest to those healing springs called Saratoga.

Except for this path and a deep worn war-trail north to the Sacandaga, which was the Iroquois road to Canada, and except for the wood road to Sir William's Mayfield and Fish House settlements, we of Fonda's Bush were utterly cut off. Also, save for the new Block House at Mayfield, we were unprotected in a vast wilderness which embodied the very centre of the Mohawk country.

True, north of us stood that little pleasure house built for his hour of leisure by Sir William, and called "The Summer House."

Painted white and green, it stood on a hard ridge jutting out into those dismal, drowned lands which we call the Great Vlaie. But it was not fortified.

Also, to the north, lay the Fish House, a hunting lodge of Sir William. But these places were no protection for us. On the other hand, they seemed a menace; for Tories, it had been rumoured, were ever skulking along the Vlaie and the Sacandaga; and for aught we knew, these buildings were already designed to be made into block-houses and to be garrisoned by our enemies as soon as the first rifle-shot cracked out in the cause of liberty.

Our company of the Mohawk Regiment numbered thirty-six rifles—all that now remained of the old company, three-fourths of which had already deserted to the Canadas with Butler. All our officers had fled; Joe Scott of Maxon, formerly a sergeant, now commanded us; Benjamin de Luysnes was our lieutenant; Dries Bowman and Phil Helmer our sergeants—both already suspected.

Well, we got away from Stoner's, marching in double file, and only the little creatures of the forest to hear our drums and fifes.

But the old discipline which had obtained in all our Tryon regiments when Sir William was our Major General and the landed gentry our officers seemed gone; a dull sense of bewilderment reigned, confusing many among us, as when leaderless men begin to realize how they had depended upon a sturdy staff now broken forever.

We marched with neither advanced guard nor flankers for

the first half mile; then Joe Scott halted us and made Nick Stoner put away his beloved fife and sent him out on our right flank where the forest was heavy.

Me he selected to scout forward on the left—a dirty job where alders and willows grew thick above the bogs.

But why in God's name our music played to advertise our coming I can not guess, for our men needed no heartening, having courage and resolution, only the lack of officers causing them any anxiety at all.

On the left flank of the little column I kept very easily in touch because of this same silly drumming and fifing. And I was glad when we came to high ground and breasted the hills which lead to that higher plateau, over which runs the road to Johnstown.

Plodding along in the bush, keeping a keen watch for any enemy who might come in paint or in scarlet coat, and the far rhythm of our drums thumping dully in my ears, I wondered whether other companies of my regiment were marching on Johnstown, and if other Tryon regiments—or what was left of them—were also afoot that day.

Was this, then, the beginning of the war in the Northland? And, when we made a prisoner of Sir John, would all the dusky forests glow with scarlet war-paint and scarlet coats?

Today birds sang. Tomorrow the terrific panther-slogan of the Iroquois might break out into hell's own uproar among these purple hills.

Was this truly the beginning? Would these still, leafy trails where the crested partridge strutted witness bloody combats between old neighbors—all the horrors of a fratricidal war?

Would the painted men of the woods hold their hands while Tory and patriot fought it out? Or was this utter and supreme horror to be added to this unnatural conflict?

Reflecting very seriously upon these matters, I trotted forward, rifle a-trail, and saw nothing living in the woods save a big hare or two in the alders, and the wild brown poultry of the woods, that ran to cover or rose into thunderous flight among the thickets.

About four o'clock came to me Godfrey Shew, of Fish House, a private soldier like myself, with news of a halt on the Johnstown road, and orders that I eat a snack and rest in my tracks.

He told me that a company of horse from Albany was out scouting along the Mohawk, and that a column of three thousand

men under Colonel Dayton were marching on Johnstown and had passed Schenectady about noon.

Other news he had none, excepting that our company was to remain where we had halted, in order to stop the road to Fonda's Bush and Saratoga, in case Sir John should attempt to retire this way.

"Well, Godfrey," said I, "if Sir John truly turns out to be without shame and honour, and if he marches this way, there is like to be a lively time for us of the Bush, because Sir John has three hundred Highlanders to thirty odd of ourselves, and enough Borderers and Tory militia to double the count."

"We all know that," said Shew calmly, "and are not afraid."

"Do you think our people mean to stand?"

"Yes," said he simply.

A hot thrill of pride tingled my every vein. Suddenly I completely comprehended that these plain folk of Fonda's Bush were my own people; that I was one of them; that, as they meant to stand for the ancient liberties of all Englishmen, now wickedly denied them, so I also meant to stand to the end.

And now, at last, I comprehended that I was in actual revolt against that King and against that nobility and gentry who were deserting us when we had so desperate need of them in this coming battle for human freedom in a slave-cursed world.

The cleavage had come at last; the Northland was clean split; the red livery of the King's men had suddenly become a target for every honest rifle in Tryon.

"Godfrey," I said, "the last chance for truce is passing as you and I stand here,—the last chance for any reconciliation and brotherly understanding between us and our Tory neighbors."

"It is better that way," he said, giving me a sombre look.

I nodded, but all the horror of civil war lay heavy in my heart and I thought of my many friends in Tryon who would wear the scarlet coat tomorrow, and whom I now must try to murder with my proper hands, lest they do the like for me.

Around us, where we were standing, a golden dusk reigned in the forest, into which, through the roof of green above, fell a long sunbeam, lighting the wooded aisle as a single candle on the altar gleams athwart the gloom of some still cathedral.

At five o'clock Godfrey and I had not moved from that silent place where we stood on watch, leaning upon our rifles.

Twice soldiers came to bid us keep close guard in these open

woods which, being primeval, were clear of underbrush and deep with the brown carpet of dead leaves.

At last, toward six o'clock, we heard our drums rolling in the distance—signal to scout forward. I ran out among the great trees and started on toward Johnstown, keeping Godfrey in view on my left hand.

Very soon I came out of the forest on the edge of cleared land. Against the evening sky I saw the spires of Johnstown, stained crimson in the westering sun which was going down red as a cherry.

But what held me in spell was the sight that met my eyes across the open meadows, where moving ranks of musket-barrels glanced redly in the last gleam of sunset and the naked swords and gorgets of mounted officers glittered.

Godfrey Shew emerged from the edge of the forest on my left and stood knee deep in last year's wild grass, one hand shading his eyes.

"What troops are those?" I shouted to him. "They look like the Continental Line!"

"It's a reg'lar rig'ment," he bawled, "but whose I know not!"

The clanking of their armament came clearly to my ears; the timing tap of their drum sounded nearer still.

"There can be no mistake," I called out to Godfrey; "yonder marches a regiment of the New York line! We're at war!"

We moved out across the pasture. I examined my flint and priming, and, finding all tight and bright, waded forward waist high, through last year's ghostly goldenrod, ready for a quick shot if necessary.

The sun had gone down; a lilac-tinted dusk veiled the fields, through which the gay evening chirruping of the robins rang incessantly.

"There go our people!" shouted Godfrey.

I had already caught sight of the Fonda's Bush Company filing between some cattle-bars to the left of us; and knew they must be making straight for Johnson Hall.

We shouldered our pieces and ran through the dead weeds to intercept them; but there was no need for haste, because they halted presently in some disorder; and I saw Joe Scott walking to and fro along the files, gesticulating.

And then, as Godfrey and I came up with them, we witnessed the first shameful exhibition of disorder that for so many months disgraced the militia of New York—a stupidity partly cowardly, partly treacherous, which at one time so incensed His Excel-

lency the Virginian that he said they were, as a body, more detrimental than helpful to the cause, and proposed to disband them.

In the light of later events, I now realize that their apparent poltroonery arose not from individual cowardice. But these levies had no faith in their companies because every battalion was still full of Tories, nor had any regiment yet been purged.

Also, they had no confidence in their officers, who, for the greater part, were as inexperienced as they themselves. And I think it was because of these things that the New York militia behaved so contemptibly after the battle of Long Island, and in Tryon County, until the terrific trial by fire at Oriskany had burnt the dross out of us and left only the nobler metal.

Our Fonda's Bush Company presented a most mortifying spectacle as Godfrey and I came up. Joe Scott stood facing the slovenly single rank which he had contrived to parade in the gathering dusk; and he was arguing with the men while they talked back loudly.

There was a hubbub of voices, angry arguments, some laughter which sounded more sinister to me than the cursing.

Then Charlie Cady and John Howell of Sacandaga left the ranks, refusing to listen to Scott, and withdrew a little distance, where they stood sullenly in their defiance.

Elias Cady called out that he would not march to the Hall to take Sir John, and he, also, left the ranks.

Then, and despite Joe Scott's pleading, Phil Helmer and his sullen son, John, walked away and joined the Cadys, and called on Andrew Bowman to do the like.

Dries wavered; but Baltus Weed and Eugene Grinnis left the company.

Which so enraged me that I, also, forgot all discipline and duty, and shook my rifles at the mutineers.

"You Tory dogs!" I said, "we're well purged of you, and I for one thank God that we now know you for what you are!"

Godfrey, a stark, fierce figure in his blackened buckskins, went out in front of our single rank and called to the malcontents:

"Pull foot, you swine, or I'll mark you!"

And, "Pull foot!" shouted Nick Stoner, "and be damned to you! Why do you loiter! Do you wait for a volley in your guts!"

At that, Balty Weed turned and ran toward the woods; but the others moved more slowly and sullenly, not exactly menacing

us with their rifles, but carrying them conveniently across the hollow of their left arms.

In the increasing darkness I heard somebody sob, and saw Joe Scott standing with one hand across his eyes, as though to close from his sight such a scene of deep disgrace.

Then I went to him. I was trembling and could scarce command my voice, but gave him a salute and stood at attention until he finally noticed me.

"Well, John," said he, "this is like to be the death of me."

"Sir; will you order the drums to beat a march?"

"Do you think the men will march?"

"Yes, sir—what remains of them."

He came slowly back, motioning what was left of the company to close up. I could not hear what he said, but the men began to count off, and their voices were resolute enough to hearten all.

So presently Nick Stoner, who acted as fife-major, blew lustily into his fife, playing the marching tune, which is called "The Little Red Foot"; and the drums beat it; and we marched in column of fours to take Sir John at his ancestral Hall, if it chanced to be God's will.

CHAPTER IX

STOLE AWAY

JOHNSON HALL was a blaze of light with candles in every window, and great lanterns flaring from both stone forts which flanked the Hall, and along the new palisades which Sir John had built recently for his defense.

All gates and doors stood wide open, and officers in Continental uniform and in the uniform of the Palatine Regiment, were passing in and out with a great clanking of swords and spurs.

Everywhere companies of regular infantry from Colonel Dayton's regiment of the New York Line were making camp, and I saw their baggage waggons drive up from the town below and go into park to the east of the Hall, where cattle were lying in the new grass.

An officer of the Palatine Regiment carrying a torch came up to Joe Scott, where our little company stood at ease along the hedge fence.

"What troops are these, sir?" he inquired, indicating us with a nervous gesture.

And when he was informed:

"Oho!" said he, "there should be material for rangers among your farmer-militia. Pick me two men for Colonel Dayton who live by rifle and trap and who know the wilderness from Albany to the Lakes."

So our captain told off Nick Stoner and me, and we stepped out of the ranks into the red torch-glow.

"Thank you, sir," said the Palatine officer to our Captain. And to us: "Follow me, lads."

He was a brisk, handsome and smartly uniformed officer of militia; and his cheerful demeanor heartened me who had lately witnessed such humiliations and disgrace.

We followed him through the stockade gate and into the great house, so perfectly familiar to me in happier days.

Excepting for the noise and confusion of officers coming and going, there was no disorder within; the beautiful furniture stood ranged in stately symmetry; the pictures hung on the walls;

but I saw no silver anywhere, and all the candlesticks were pewter.

As we came to the library, an officer in the uniform of a colonel of the Continental Line turned from a group of men crowded around the centre table, on which lay a map. Nick Stoner and I saluted his epaulettes.

He came close to us and searched our faces coolly enough, as a farmer inspects an offered horse.

"This is young Nick Stoner, of Fonda's Bush, sir," said the Palatine officer.

"Oh," said the Colonel drily, "I have heard of the Stoner boys. And what may be your name?" he inquired, fastening his piercing eyes on mine.

"John Drogue, sir."

"I have heard of you, also," he remarked, more drily still.

For a full minute, it seemed to me, he scrutinized me from head to foot with a sort of curiosity almost brutal. Then, on his features a fine smile softened what had seemed insolence. With a glance he dismissed the Palatine, motioned us to follow him, and we three entered the drawing-room across the hall, which was lighted but empty.

"Mr. Drogue," said he, "I am Colonel Dayton; and I have in my personal baggage a lieutenant's commission for you from our good Governor, procured, I believe, through the solicitation of our mutual and most excellent friend, Lord Stirling."

I stood astonished to learn of my preferment, never dreaming nor even wishing for military rank, but perfectly content to carry the sack of a private soldier in this most just of all wars. And as for Billy Alexander remembering to so serve me, I was still more amazed. For Lord Stirling was already a general officer in His Excellency's new army, and I never expected him to remember me amid the desperate anxieties of his new position.

"Mr. Drogue," said Dayton, "you, I believe, are the only example among the gentry of Tryon County who has openly embraced the cause of our thirteen colonies. I do not include the Albany Patroon; I speak only of the nobility and gentry of this county. . . . And it took courage to turn your back upon your own caste."

"It would have taken more to turn against my own countrymen, sir."

He smiled. "Come, sir, were you not sometime Brent-Meester to Sir William?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you should know the forest, Mr. Drogue."

"I do know it."

"So General Schuyler has informed me."

He clasped his gloved hands behind his back and began to pace to and fro, his absent glances on the window candles. Presently he halted:

"Sir John is fled. Did you know it?" he said abruptly.

I felt the hot shame burn my face to the roots of my hair.

"Broke his parole of honour and gone off," added Dayton. "Where do you suppose he is making for with his Tories and Highlanders?"

I could scarcely speak, so mortified was I that a gentleman of my own class could have so foully conducted. But I made out to say that Sir John, no doubt, was traveling toward Canada.

"Certainly," said the Colonel; "but which route?"

"God knows, sir. By the Sacandaga and the Lakes, no doubt."

"Could he go by Saratoga and the top o' the Hudson?"

"It is a pathless wilderness."

"Yes. And still I think the rogue went that way. I have rangers out looking for signs of him beyond Ballston. Also, I sent half a battalion toward the Sacandaga. Of course Albany Royalists warned him of my coming; I couldn't prevent that, nor could Schuyler, no, nor the very devil himself!

"And here am I at the Hall, and the fox stole away to the Canadas. And what now to do I know not. . . . Do *you?*"

He shot the question in my face point blank; and I stood dumb for a minute, striving to collect and marshall any ideas that might bear upon so urgent a matter.

"Colonel," said I, "unless the British hold Champlain, Sir John would scarcely risk a flight in that direction. No. He would prefer to plunge into the wilderness and travel by Oswegatchi."

"Do you so believe, Mr. Drogue?"

I considered a moment more; then:

"Yet, if Guy Johnson's Indians have come down toward the Sacandaga to protect him—knowing that he had meant to flee——"

I looked at Dayton, then turned to Nick.

"What think you, Nick?" I demanded.

"By God," he blurted out, "I am of that mind too! Only a madman would attempt the wilderness by Oswegatchi; and I wager that Sir John is already beyond the Sacandaga and making for the Canadas on the old Mohawk war-trail!"

Colonel Dayton laid one hand on my shoulder:

"Mr. Drogue," said he, "we have militia and partizans more than sufficient in Tryon. What we need are more regulars, too; but most of all, and in this crisis, we need rangers. God alone knows what is coming upon Tryon County from the North,—what evil is breeding there,—what sinister forces are gathering to overwhelm these defenceless settlements.

"We have scarcely a fort on this frontier, scarcely a block house. Every town and village and hamlet north of Albany is unprotected; every lonely settler is now at the mercy of this unknown and monstrous menace which is gathering like a thundercloud in the North.

"Regular regiments require time to muster; the militia have yet to prove their worth; partizans, minute men, alarm companies—the value of all these remains a question still. Damn it, I want rangers! I want them *now!*"

He began to stride about the room again in his perplexity, but presently came back to where we stood.

"How many rifles in your company from Fonda's Bush?" he demanded.

I blushed to tell him, and further confessed what had occurred that very evening in the open fields before Johnstown.

"Well," said he coolly, "it is well to be rid of vermin. Now you should pick your men in safety, Mr. Drogue. And if none will volunteer—such as have families or are not fit material for rangers—you are authorized to go out into the wilderness and recruit any forest-running fellow you can persuade."

He drove one gloved hand into the palm of the other to emphasize what he said:

"I want real rangers, not militia! I want young men who laugh at any face old Death can pull at them! I want strong men, keen men, tough men, rough men.

"I want men who fear God, if that may be, or who fear the devil, if that may be; but who fear nothing else on earth!"

He shot a look at Nick, "—like that boy there!" he exclaimed—"or I am no judge of men! And like yourself, Mr. Drogue, when once they blood you! Come, sir; can you find a few such men for me, and take full charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"A pledge!" he exclaimed, beating his gloved palms. "And when you can collect a dozen—the first full dozen—I want you to stop the Iroquois trail at the Sacandaga. That's where you shall chiefly operate—along the Sacandaga and the mountains

northward! That's where I expect trouble. There lies this accursed war-trail; and along it there is like to be a very bloody business!"

He turned aside and stood smiting his hands softly together, his preoccupied eyes regarding the candles.

"A very bloody business," he repeated absently to himself. "Only rangers can aid us now. . . . Help us a little in this dreadful crisis. . . . Until we can recruit—build forts——"

An officer appeared at the open door and saluted.

"Well, sir," inquired Dayton sharply.

"Lady Johnson is not to be discovered in the town, sir."

"What? Has Lady Johnson run away also? Does the poor, deluded woman imagine that any man in my command would offer insult to her?"

"It is reported, sir, that Lady Johnson said some very bitter things concerning us. It is further reported that Lady Johnson is gone in a great rage to the hunting lodge of the late Sir William, as there were already family servants there at last accounts."

"Where's this place?" demanded Dayton, turning to me.

"The summer house on the Vlaie, sir."

"Very well. Take what men you can collect and go there instantly, Mr. Drogue, and place that foolish woman under arrest!"

A most painful colour burnt my face, but I saluted in silence.

"The little fool," muttered Dayton, "to think we meant to insult her!" And to me: "Let her remain there, Mr. Drogue, if she so desires. Only guard well the house. I shall march a battalion of my regiment thither in the morning, and later I shall order a company of Colonel Livingston's regiment to Fish House. And then we shall see what we shall see," he added grimly to the officer in the doorway, who smiled in return.

There ensued a silence through which, very far away, we heard the music of another regiment marching into the town, which lay below us under the calm, high stars.

"That's Livingston, now!" said Colonel Dayton, briskly; and went out in a hurry, his sword and spurs ringing loudly in the hall. And a moment later we heard him ride away at a gallop, and the loud clatter of horsemen at his heels.

I pulled a bit of jerked venison from my sack and bit into it. Nick Stoner filled his mouth with cold johnny-cake.

And so, munching our supper, we left the Hall, headed for the Drowned Lands to make prisoner an unhappy girl who had gone off in a rage to Summer House Point.

CHAPTER X

A NIGHT MARCH

THE village of Johnstown was more brightly lighted than I had ever before seen it. Indeed, as we came out of the Hall the glow of it showed rosy in the sky and the distant bustle in the streets came quite plainly to our ears.

Near the hedge fence outside the Hall we came upon remnants of our militia company, which had just been dismissed from further duty, and the men permitted to go home.

Some already were walking away across the fields toward the Fonda's Bush road, and these all were farmers; but I saw De Luysnes and Johnny Silver, the French trappers, talking to old man Stoner and his younger boy; and Nick and I went over to where they were gathered near a splinter torch, which burned with a clear, straight flame like a candle.

Joe Scott, too, was there, and I told him about my commission, whereupon he gave me the officer's salute and we shook hands very gravely.

"There is scarce a handful remaining of our company," said he, "and you had best choose from us such as may qualify for rangers, and who are willing to go with you. As for me, I can not go, John, because I have here a letter but just delivered from Honikol Herkimer, calling me to the Canajoharie Regiment."

It appeared, also, that old man Stoner had already enlisted with Colonel Livingston's regiment, and his thirteen-year-old boy, also, had been taken into the same command as a drummer.

Dries Bowman shook his head when I appealed to him, saying he had a wife and children to look after, and would not leave them alone in the Bush.

None could find fault with such an answer, though his surly tone troubled me a little.

However, the two French trappers offered to enlist in my company of Rangers, and they instantly began to strap up their packs like men prepared to start on any journey at a moment's notice.

Then Godfrey Shew, of Fish House, said to me very simply that his conscience and his country weighed more together than did his cabin; and that he was quite ready to go with me at once.

At that, Joe de Golyer, of Varick's, fetched a laugh and came up in the torch-light and stood there towering six foot eight in his greasy buckskins, and showing every hound's tooth in his boyish head.

"Give me my shilling, John," quoth he, "for I, also, am going with you. I've a grist-mill and a cabin and a glebe fair cleared at Varick's. But my father was all French; I have seen red for many a day; and if the King of England wants my mill I shall take my pay for it where I find it!"

Silver began to grin and strut and comb out his scarlet thrums with dirty fingers.

"Enfin," said he, with both thumbs in his arm-pits, "we shall be ver' happee familee in our pretee Bush. No more Toree, no more Iroquois! Tryon Bush all belong to us."

"All that belongs to us today," remarked Godfrey grimly, "is what we hold over our proper rifles, Johnny Silver!"

Old man Stoner nodded: "What you look at over your rifle sight is all that'll ever feed and clothe you now, Silver."

"Oh, sure, by gar!" cried Silver with his lively grin. "Deer in blue coat, man in red coat, même chose, savvy? All good game to Johnee Silver. Ver' fine chasse! Ah, sacré garce!" And he strutted about like a cock-patridge, slapping his hips.

Nick Stoner burst into a loud laugh.

"Ours is like to be a rough companionship, John!" he said. "For the first shot fired will hum in our ears like new ale; and the first screech from the Iroquois will turn us into devils!"

"Come," said I with a shiver I could not control.

I shook hands with Joe Scott; Nick took leave of his big, gaunt father. We both looked at Dries Bowman, but he had turned away in pretense of firing the torch.

"Good-bye, Brent-Meester!" cried little Johnny Stoner in his childish treble, as we started down the stony way toward the town below.

Johnstown streets were full of people and every dwelling, shop, and tavern lighted brightly as we came into the village.

Mounted troopers of the Albany Horse guarded every street or clattered to and fro in search, they told us, of hidden arms and supplies. Soldiers of the regiments of Colonels Dayton and

Livingston, too, were to be seen everywhere, some guarding the jail, some encamped before the Court House, others occupying suspected dwellings and taverns notorious as Tory nests.

Such inhabitants as were known friends to liberty roamed about the streets or stood in knots under the trees, whispering together and watching the soldiers. But Tories and their families remained indoors, peering sullenly from their windows and sometimes scowling upon these soldiers of a new nation, within the confines of which they already were discovering that no place remained for any friend to England or her King.

As my little file of riflemen passed on moccasined feet through the swarming streets of Johnstown, soldiers and townspeople gazed curiously after us, surmising immediately what might be our errand. And many greeted us or called out pleasantries after us, such as, "Hearkaway! The red fox will fool you yet!" And, "Dig him out, you wolf-hounds! He's gone to earth at Sacandaga!"

Many soldiers cheered us, swinging their cocked hats; and Nick Stoner and Johnny Silver swung their coon-tailed caps in return, shouting the wolf-cry of the Coureur-du-Bois—"Yik-yik-hoo-hoolo—o!"

And now we passed the slow-moving baggage waggons of Colonel Livingston's regiment, toiling up from Caughnawaga, the sleepy teamsters nodding, and armed soldiers drowsing behind, who scarce opened one eye as we trotted by them and out into the darkness of the Mayfield road.

Now, in this dim and starlit land, we moved more slowly, for the road lay often through woods where all was dark; and among us none had fetched any lantern.

It was close to midnight, I think, when we were challenged; and I knew we were near the new Block House, because I heard the creek, very noisy in the dark, and smelled English grass.

The sentinel held us very firmly and bawled to his fellow, who arrived presently with a lantern; and we saw the grist-mill close to us, with its dripping wheel and the high flume belching water.

When they were satisfied, I asked for news and they told us they had seen none of Sir John's people, but that a carriage carrying two ladies had nigh driven over them, refusing to halt, and that they had been ashamed to fire on women.

He informed us, further, that a sergeant and five men of Colonel Dayton's regiment had arrived at the Block House and would remain the night.

"Also," said one of the men, "we caught a girl riding a fine

horse this morning, who gave an account that she came from Fonda's Bush and was servant to Douw Fonda at Caughnawaga."

"Where is the horse?" I asked.

"Safe stabled in the new fort."

"Where is the girl?"

"Well," said he, "she sits yonder eating soupaan in the fort, and all the Continentals making moon-eyes at her."

"That's my horse," said I shortly. "Take your lantern and show her to me."

One of the militia men picked up the lantern, which had been burning on the grass between us, and I followed along the bank of the creek.

Presently I saw the Block House against the stars, but all loops were shuttered and no light came from them.

There was a ditch, a bridge of three logs, a stockade not finished; and we passed in between the palings where a gateway was to be made, and where another militia-man sat guard on a chopping block, cradling his firelock between his knees, fast asleep.

The stable was but a shed. Kaya turned her head as I went to her and made a soft little noise of welcome, and fell a-lipping me and rubbing her velvet nose against me.

"The Scotch girl cared for your mare and fed her, paying four pence," said the militia-man. "But we were ashamed to take pay."

I examined Kaya. She had been well cared for. Then I lifted her harness from the wooden peg where it hung and saddled her by the lantern light.

And when all was snug I passed the bridle over my arm and led her to the door of the Block House.

Before I entered, I could hear from within the strains of a fiddle; and then opened the door and went in.

The girl, Penelope, sat on a block of wood eating soupaan with a pewter spoon out of a glazed bowl upon her knees.

Ten soldiers stood in a ring around her, every man jack o' them a-courting as hard as he could court and ogle—which all was as plain to me as the nose on your face!—and seemed to me a most silly sight.

For the sergeant, a dapper man smelling rank of pomatum and his queue smartly floured, was a-wooing her with his fiddle and rolling big eyes at her to kill at twenty paces; and a tall, thin corporal was tying a nosegay made of swamp marigolds for her, which, now and again, he pretended to match against

her yellow hair and smirked when she lifted her eyes to see what he was about.

Every man jack o' them was up to something, one with a jug o' milk to douse her soupaan withal, another busy with his Barlow carving a basket out of a walnut to please her;—this fellow making pictures on birch-bark; that one scraping her name on his powder-horn and pricking a heart about it.

As for the girl, Penelope, she sat upon her chopping block with downcast eyes and very leisurely eating of her porridge; but I saw her lips traced with that faint smile which I remembered.

What with the noise of the fiddle and the chatter all about her, neither she nor the soldiers heard the door open, nor, indeed, noticed us at all until my militia-men sings out: "Lieutenant Drogue, boys, on duty from Johnstown!"

At that the Continentals jumped up very lively, I warrant you, being troops of some little discipline already; and I spoke civilly to their sergeant and went over to the girl, Penelope, who had risen, bowl in one hand, spoon in t'other, and looking upon me very hard out of her brown eyes.

"Come," said I pleasantly, "you have kept your word to me and I mean to keep mine to you. My mare is saddled for you."

"You take me to Caughnawaga, sir!" she exclaimed, setting bowl and spoon aside.

"Tomorrow. Tonight you shall ride with us to the Summer House, where I promise you a bed."

I held out my hand. She placed hers within it, looked shyly at the Continentals where they stood, dropped a curtsey to all, and went out beside me.

"Is there news?" she asked as I lifted her to the saddle.

"Sir John is gone."

"I meant news from Caughnawaga."

"Why, yes. All is safe there. A regiment of Continentals passed through Caughnawaga today with their waggons. So, for the time at least, all is quite secure along the Mohawk."

"Thank you," she said in a low voice.

I led the horse back to the road, where my little squad of men was waiting me, and who fell in behind me, astonished, I think, as I started east by north once more along the Mayfield road.

Presently Nick stole to my side through the darkness, not a whit embarrassed by my new military rank.

"Why, John," says he in a guarded voice, "is this not the Scotch girl of Caughnawaga who rides your mare, Kaya?"

I told him how she had come to the Bowmans the night before, and how, having stolen my mare, I bargained with her and must send her or guide her myself on the morrow to Cayadutta.

I was conscious of his stifled mirth but paid no heed, for we were entering the pineries now, where all was inky dark, and the trail to be followed only by touch of foot.

"Drop your bridle; Kaya will follow me," I called back softly to the girl, Penelope. "Hold to the saddle and be not afraid."

"I am not afraid," said she.

We were now moving directly toward Fonda's Bush, and not three miles from my own house, but presently we crossed the brook, ascended a hill, and so came out of the pinery and took a wide and starlit waggon-path which bore to the left, running between fields where great stumps stood.

This was Sir William's carriage road to the Point; and twice we crossed the Kennyetto by shallow fords.

Close beside this carriage path on the north, and following all the way, ran the Iroquois war trail, hard and clean as a sheep walk, worn more than a foot deep by the innumerable moccasined feet that had trodden it through the ages.

Very soon we passed Nine-Mile Tree, a landmark of Sir William's, which was a giant pine left by the road to tower in melancholy majesty all alone.

When I rode the hills as Brent-Meester, this pine was like a guide post to me, visible for miles.

Now, as I passed, I looked at it in the silvery dusk of the stars and saw some strange object shining on the bark.

"What is that shining on Nine-Mile Tree?" said I to Nick. He ran across the road; we marched on, I leading, then the Scotch girl on my mare, then my handful of men trudging doggedly with pieces a-trail.

A moment later Nick same swiftly to my side and nudged me; and looking around I saw an Indian hatchet in his hand, the blade freshly brightened.

"It was sticking in the tree," he breathed. "My God, John, the Iroquois are out!"

Chill after chill crawled up my back as I began to understand the significance of that freshly polished little war-axe with its limber helve of hickory worn slippery by long usage, and its loop of braided deer-hide blackened by age.

"Was there aught else?" I whispered.

"Nothing except this Mohawk hatchet struck deep into the bark of Nine-Mile Tree, and sticking there."

"Do you know what it means, Nick?"

"Aye. Also, it is an *old* war-axe *newly* polished. And struck deep into the tallest pine in Tryon. Any fool must know what all this means. Shall you speak of this to the others, John?"

"Yes," said I, "they must know at once."

I waited for Kaya to come up, laid my hand on the bridle and called back in a low voice to my men: "Boys, an Indian war-axe was left sticking in Nine-Mile Tree. Nick drew it out. The hatchet is an old one, but *it is newly polished!*"

"Sacré garce!" whispered Silver fiercely. "Now, grâce à dieu, shall I reckon with those dirtee trap-robbers who take my pelts like the carcajou! Ha! So is it war? A la bonheur! Let them come for my hair then! And if they get Johnny Silver's hair they may paint the Little Red Foot on the hoop, nom de dieu!"

"Get along forward, boys," said I. "Some of you keep an eye on the mountains lest they begin calling to Sir John with fire——"

"A flame on Maxon!" whispered Nick at my elbow.

I jerked my head around as though I had been shot. There it rose, a thin red streak above the blunt headland that towered over the Drowned Lands. Steadily as a candle's flame in a still room, it burned for a few moments, then was shattered into crimson jets.

Far to the North, on some invisible mountain, a faint crimson flare replied.

Nobody spoke, but I knew that every eye was fixed on those Indian signal-fires as we moved rapidly forward into the swale country where swampy willows spread away on either hand and little pools of water caught the starlight.

The road, too, had become wet, and water stood in the ruts; and every few minutes we crossed corduroy.

"Yonder stands the Summer House," whispered Nick.

A ridge of hard land ran out into the reed-set water. A hinged gate barred the neck. Nick swung it wide; I led my mare and her rider through it; posted Godfrey and Silver there; posted Luysnes and De Golyer a hundred paces inland near the apple trees; left Nick by the well, and, walking beside my mare, continued on to the little green and white hunting lodge where, through the crescents of closed shutters, rays of light streamed out into the night.

Here I lifted the Scotch girl from her saddle, walked with her to the kitchen porch, and knocked softly on the kitchen door.

After a while I could hear a stirring within, voices, steps.

"Nicholas! Pontioch! Flora!" I called in guarded tones.

Presently I heard Flora's voice inquiring timidly who I might be.

"Mr. Drogue is arrived to await her ladyship's commands," said I.

At that the bolts slid and the door creaked open. Black Flora stood there in her yellow night shift, rolling enormous eyes at me, and behind her I saw Colas with a lighted dip, gaping to see me enter with a strange woman.

"Is your mistress here?" I demanded.

"Yassuh," answered Flora, "mah lady done gone to baid, suh."

"Who else is here? Mistress Swift?"

"Yassuh."

"Is there a spare bed?"

Flora rolled suspicious eyes at the Scotch girl, but thought there was a bed in Sir William's old gun room.

I waited until the black wench had made sure, then bade Colas look to my mare, said a curt good-night to Penelope Grant, and went out to unroll my blanket on the front porch.

When I whistled softly Nick came across the garden from the well.

"Lady Johnson is here," said I. "Yonder lies my blanket. I stand first watch. Go you and sleep now while you can——"

"Sleep first, John. I am not weary——"

"Remember I am your officer, Nick!"

"Oh, hell!" quoth he. "That does not awe me, John. What awes me in you is your kindness—and to remember that your ancestors wore their gold rings upon their fingers."

I passed my arm about his shoulders, then released him and went slowly over to the well. And here I primed my rifle with bright, dry powder, shouldered it, and began to walk my post at a brisk pace to cheat the sleep which meddled with my heavy eyes and set me yawning till my young jaws crackled.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMER HOUSE POINT

THE sun in my eyes and the noise of drums awoke me, where, relieved on post by Nick, I had been sleeping on the veranda. Beyond the orchard on the Johnstown road, mounted officers in blue and buff were riding amid undulating ranks of moving muskets; and I knew that the Continental Line had arrived at Summer House Point, and was glad of it.

As I shook loose my blanket and stood up, black Flora and Colas came up from their kitchen below ground, and seemed astonished to see me still there.

"Is your mistress awake?" I demanded. But they did not know; so I bade Flora go inside and awaken Lady Johnson. Then I went down to the well in the orchard, where Nick stood sentry, looking through the blossoming boughs at what was passing on the mainland road beyond the Point.

It was a soft, sunny morning, and a pleasant scent from the apple bloom, which I remember was full o' bees.

Through the orchard, on the small peninsula, now came striding toward us a dozen or more officers of the regiments of Colonels Dayton and Livingston, all laughing together and seeming very merry; and some, as they passed under the flowering branches, plucked twigs of white and pink flowers and made themselves nosegays.

Their major, who seemed to know me as an officer, though I did not know him, called out in high good humour:

"Well, my lord Northesk, did you and your rangers arrive in time to close the cage on our pretty bird?"

"Yes, sir," said I, reddening, and not pleased.

"Lady Johnson is here then?"

"Yes, Major."

At that instant the front door opened and Lady Johnson came out quickly and stood on the veranda, the sun striking across her pallid face, which paleness was more due to her condition than to any fear of our soldiery.

She was but partly robed, and that hastily; her hair all un-

powdered and undressed, and only a levete of China silk flung about her girlish figure, and making still more evident her delicate physical condition.

But in her eyes I saw storms a-brewing, and her lips and features went white as she stood there, clenching and unclenching one hand, and still a little blinded by the sun in her face.

We all had uncovered before her, bowing very low; and, if she noticed me at first, I am not certain, but she gave our Major such a deadly stare that it checked his speech and put him clean out o' countenance, leaving him a-twiddling his sword-knot and dumb as a fish.

"What does this mean?" said she, her lip trembling with increasing passion. "Have you come here to arrest me?"

And, as nobody replied, she stamped her bare foot in its silken chamber-shoe, like any angry child in petty fury when disobliged.

"Is it not enough," she continued, "that you drive my unhappy husband out of his own house, but you must presently follow me here to mock and insult me? What has our family done to merit this outrage?"

Our Major, astonished and out o' countenance, attempted a civil word to calm her, but she swept us all with scornful eyes and stamped her foot again in such anger that her shoe fell off and landed on the grass.

"Our only crime is loyalty to a merciful and Christian King!" she cried, paying no heed to the shoe. "Our punishment is that we are like to be hunted as they hunt wild beasts! By a pack of rebels, too! Shame, gentlemen! Is this worthy even of embattled shopkeepers?"

"Madame, I beg you——"

But she had no patience to listen.

"You have forced me out of my home in Johnstown," she said bitterly, "and I thought to find refuge under this poor roof. But now you come hunting me here! Very well, gentlemen, I leave you in possession and go to Fish House. And if you hunt me out o' Fish House, I shall go on, God knows where!—for I do not choose to endure the insult with which your mere presence here affronts me!"

I had picked up her silk shoe and now went to her with it, where she stood on the veranda, biting at her lip, and her eyes all a-glitter with angry tears.

"For God's sake, madam," said I, "do not use us so harshly. We mean no insult and no harm——"

"John Drogue," she said with a great sob, "I have loved you

as a brother, but I had rather see you dead there on this violated threshold than know that the Laird of Northesk is become a rebel to his King!"

I knelt down and drew the shoe over her bare foot. Then I stood up and took her hand, laying it very gently upon my arm. She suffered me to lead her into the house—to the door of her bedroom, where Claudia, already dressed, took her from me.

"Oh, John, John," she sobbed, "what is this pack o' riff-raff doing here with their cobbler majors and carpenter colonels—all these petty shop-keepers in uniform who come from filthy Boston to ride over us?"

Claudia's eyes were very bright, but without any trace of fear or anger.

"What troops are these, Jack?" she inquired coolly. "And do they really come here to make prisoners of two poor women?"

I told her that these soldiers formed a mixed battalion from the commands of Colonels Dayton and Livingston, and that they would encamp for the present within sight of the Summer House.

"Do you mean that Polly and I are prisoners?" she repeated incredulously.

"I'm afraid I do mean that, Claudia," said I.

At the word "prisoner" Lady Johnson flamed:

"Are you not ashamed, Jack Drogue, to tell me to my face such barbarous news!" she cried. "You, a gentleman, to consort with vulgar bandits who make prisoners of women! What do you think of your Boston friends now? What do you think of your blacksmith generals and 'pothecary colonels——"

"Polly! Be silent!" entreated Claudia, shaking her arm. "Is this a decent manner to conduct when the fortune of war fails to suit your tastes?"

And to me: "No one is like to harm us, I take it. We are not in personal danger, are we?"

"Good Lord!" said I, mortified that she should even ask me.

"Well, then!" she said in a lively voice to Lady Johnson, who had turned her back on me in sullen rage, "it will be but a few days at worst, Polly. These rebel officers are not ogres. No! So in Heaven's name let us make the best of this business—until Mr. Washington graciously permits us to go on to Albany or to New York."

"I shall not go thither!" stormed Lady Johnson, pacing her chamber like a very child in the tantrums; "I shall not deign to inhabit any city which is held by dirty rebels——"

"But we shall drive them out first!" insisted Claudia, with an impudent look at me. "Surely, dear, Albany will soon be a proper city to reside in; General Howe has said it;—and so we had best address a polite letter to Mr. Washington, requesting a safe conduct thither and a flag——"

"I shall not write a syllable to the arch-rebel Washington!" stormed Lady Johnson. "And I tell you plainly, Jack, I expect to have my throat cut before this shameful business is ended!"

"You had best conduct sensibly, both of you," said I bluntly; "for I'm tired of your airs and vapours; and Colonel Dayton will stand no nonsense from either of you!"

"John!" faltered Lady Johnson, "do—do you, too, mean to use us brutally?"

"I merely beg you to consider what you say before you say it, Polly Johnson! You speak to a rebel of 'dirty' rebels and 'arch' rebels; you conduct as though we, who hold another opinion than that entertained by you, were the scum and offscouring of the earth."

"I meant it not as far as it concerns you, John Drogue," she said with another sob.

"Then be pleased to trim your speech to my brother officers," said I, still hotly vexed by her silly behaviour. "We went to Johnstown to take your husband because we believe he has communicated with Canada. And it was proper of us to do so.

"We came here to detain you until some decent arrangement can be made whereby you shall have every conceivable comfort and every reasonable liberty, save only to do us a harm by communicating with your friends who are our enemies.

"Therefore, it would be wise for you to treat us politely and not rail at us like a spoiled child. Our duty here is not of our own choosing, nor is it to our taste. No man desires to play jailer to any woman. But for the present it must be so. Therefore, as I say, it might prove more agreeable for all if you and Claudia observe toward us the ordinary decencies of polite usage!"

There was a silence. Lady Johnson's back remained turned toward me; she was weeping.

Claudia took her hand and turned and looked at me with all the lively mischief, all the adorable impudence I knew so well:

"La, Mr. Drogue," says she mockingly, "some gentlemen are born so and others are made when made officers in armies. And captivity is irksome. So, if your friends desire to pay their respects to us poor captives, I for one shall not be too greatly displeased——"

"Claudia!" cried Lady Johnson, "do you desire a dish of tea with tinkers and tin-peddlars?"

"I hear you, Polly," said she, "but prefer to hear you further after breakfast—which, thank God! I can now smell a-cooking." And, to me: "Jack, will you breakfast with us——"

She stopped abruptly: the door of Sir William's gun room opened, and the Scottish girl, Penelope Grant, walked out.

"Lord!" said Claudia, looking at her in astonishment. "And who may you be, and how have you come here?"

"I am Penelope Grant," she answered, "servant to Douw Fonda of Caughnawaga; and I came last night with Mr. Drogue."

The perfect candour of her words should have clothed them with innocence. And, I think, did so. Yet, Claudia shot a wicked look at me, which did not please me.

But I ignored her and explained the situation briefly to Lady Johnson, who had turned to stare at Penelope, who stood there quite self-possessed in her shabby dress of gingham.

There was a silence; then Claudia asked the girl if she would take service with her; and Penelope shook her head.

"I pay handsomely, and I need a clever wench to care for me," insisted Claudia; "and by your fine, white hands I see you are well accustomed to ladies' needs. Are you not, Penelope?"

"I am servant to Douw Fonda," repeated the girl. "It would not be kind in me to leave him who offers to adopt me. Nor is it decent to abandon him in times like these."

Lady Johnson came forward slowly, her tear-marred eyes clearing.

"My brother, Stephen, has spoken of you. I understood him to say that you are the daughter of a Scottish minister. Is this true?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then you are no servant wench."

"I serve."

"Why?"

"My parents are dead. I must earn my bread."

"Oh. You have no means to maintain you?"

"None, madam."

"How long have you been left an orphan?"

"These three years, my lady."

"You came from Scotland?"

"From France, my lady."

"How so?"

"My father preached to the exiled Scots who live in Paris.

When he was dying, I promised to take ship and come to America, because, he said, only in America is a young girl safe from men."

"Safe?" quoth Claudia, smiling.

"Yes, madam."

"Safe from what, child?"

"From the unlawful machinations of designing men, madam. My father told me that men hunt women as a sport."

"Oh, la!" cried Claudia, laughing; "you have it hind end foremost! Man is the hunted one! Man is the victim! Is it not so, Jack?"—looking so impudently at me that I was too vexed to smile in return, but got very red and gazed elsewhere.

"And what did you then, Penelope Grant?" inquired Lady Johnson, with a soft sort of interest which was natural and unfeigned, she having a gentle heart and tender under all her pride and childishness.

"I took ship, my lady, and came to New York."

"And then?"

"I went to Parson Gano in his church,—who was a friend to my father, though a Baptist. I was but a child, and he cared for me for three years. But I could not always live on others' bounty; so he yielded to my desires and placed me as servant to Douw Fonda, who was at that time visiting New York. And so, when Mr. Fonda was ready to go home to Caughnawaga, I accompanied him."

"And are his aid and crutch in his old age," said Lady Johnson, gently. "What wonder, then, he wishes to adopt you, Penelope Grant."

"If you will be my companion," cried Claudia, "I shall dare adopt you, pretty as you are—and risk losing every lover I possess!"

The Scottish girl's brown eyes widened at that; but even Lady Johnson laughed, and I saw the loveliest smile begin to glimmer on Penelope's soft lips.

"Thank heaven for a better humour in the house," thought I, and was pleased that Claudia had made a gayety of the affair.

I went to the window and looked out. Smoke from the camp fires of the Continentals made a haze all along the reedy waterfront. I saw their sentries walking their posts; heard the noise of their axes in the bush; caught a glimpse of my own men lying in the orchard on the new grass, and Nick cooking jerked meat at a little fire of coals, which gleamed in the grass like a heap of dusty jewels.

And, as I stood a-watching, I felt a touch at my elbow, and turned to face the girl, Penelope.

"Your promise, sir," she said. "You have not forgotten?"

"No," I replied, flushing again under Claudia's mocking gaze. "But you should first eat something."

"And you, also," said Lady Johnson, coming to me and laying both hands upon my shoulders.

She looked into my eyes very earnestly, very sadly.

"Forgive me, Jack," she said.

I kissed her hands, saying that it was I who needed forgiveness, to so speak to her in her deep anxiety and unhappiness; but she shook her head and bade me remain and eat breakfast; and went away to her chamber to dress, carrying Claudia to aid her, and leaving me alone there with the girl Penelope.

"So," said I civilly, though still annoyed by memory of my horse and how this girl had carried everything with so high a hand, "so you have lived in France?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hum! Well, did you find the people agreeable?"

"Yes, sir—the children. I was but fifteen when I left France."

"Then you now own to eighteen years."

"Yes, sir."

"A venerable age."

At that she lifted her brown eyes. I smiled; and that enchanting, glimmering smile touched her lips again. And I thought of what I had heard concerning her in Caughnawaga, and how, when the old gentleman was enjoying his afternoon nap, she was accustomed to take her knitting to the porch.

And I remembered, too, what Nick and others said concerning all the gallants of the countryside, how they swarmed about that porch like flies around a sap-pan.

"I have been told," said I, "that all young men in Tryon sit ringed around you when you take your knitting to the porch at Cayadutta Lodge. Nor can I blame them, now that I have seen you smile."

At that she blushed so brightly that I was embarrassed and somewhat astonished to see how small a progress this girl had really made in coquetry. I was to learn that she blushed easily; I did not know it then; but it presently amused me to find her, after all, so unschooled.

"Why," said I, "should you show your colours to a passing craft that fires no shot nor even thinks to board you? I am

no pirate, Penelope; like those Johnstown gallants who gather like flies, they say——"

But I checked my words, not daring to plague her further, for the colour was surging in her cheeks and she seemed unaccustomed to such harmless bantering as mine.

"Lord!" thought I, "here is a very lie that this maid is any such siren as Nick thinks her, for her pretty thumb is still wet with sucking."

Yet I myself had become sensible that there really was about her a *something*—exactly what I knew not—but some seductive quality, some vague enchantment about her, something unusual which compelled men's notice. It was not, I thought, entirely the agreeable contrast of yellow hair and dark eyes; nor a smooth skin like new snow touched to a rosy hue by the afterglow.

She sat near the window, where I stood gazing out across the water, toward the mountains beyond. Her hands, joined, rested flat between her knees; her hair, in the sun, was like maple gold reflected in a ripple.

"Lord!" thought I, "small wonder that the gay blades of Tryon should come a-meddling to undo so pretty a thing."

But the thought did not please me, yet it was no concern o' mine. But I now comprehended how this girl might attract men, and, strangely enough, was sorry for it.

For it seemed plain that here was no coquette by intention or by any knowledge of the art of pleasing men; but she was one, nevertheless, so sweetly her dark eyes regarded you when you spoke; so lovely the glimmer of her smile.

And it was, no doubt, something of these that men noticed —and her youth and inexperience, which is tender tinder to hardened flint that is ever eager to strike fire and start soft stuff blazing.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHAPE IN WHITE

WE breakfasted on soupaan, new milk, johnnycake, and troutlings caught by Colas, who had gone by canoe to the outlet of Hans' Creek by daylight, after I had awakened him. Which showed me how easily one could escape from the Summer House, in spite of guards patrolling the neck and mainland road.

We were four at table; Lady Johnson, Claudia, Penelope, and I; and all seemed to be in better humour, for Claudia's bright eyes were ever roaming toward the Continental camp, where smart officers passed and repassed in the bright sunlight; and Lady Johnson did not conceal her increasing conviction that Sir John had got clean away; which, naturally, pleased the poor child mightily;—and Penelope, who had offered very simply to serve us at table, sat silent and contented by the civil usage she received from Polly Johnson, who told her very sweetly that her place was in a chair and not behind it.

"For," said my lady, "a parson's daughter may serve where her heart directs, but is nowise or otherwise to be unclassed."

"Were I obliged by circumstances to labour for my bread," said Claudia, "would you still entertain honourable though ardent sentiments toward me, Jack?"

Which saucy question I smiled aside, though it irritated me, and oddly, too, because Penelope Grant had heard—though why I should care a farthing for that I myself could not understand.

Lady Johnson laid a hand on Penelope's, who looked up at her with that shy, engaging smile I had already noticed. And,

"Penelope," said she, "if rumour does not lie, and if all our young gallants do truly gather 'round when you take your knitting to the porch of Cayadutta Lodge, then you should make it very plain to all that you are a parson's daughter as well as servant to Douw Fonda."

"How should I conduct, my lady?"

"Firmly, child. And send any light o' love a-packing at the first apropos!"

"Oh, lud!" says Claudia, "would you make a nun of her, Polly? Sure the child must learn——"

"Learn to take care of herself," quoth Polly Johnson tartly. "You have been schooled from childhood, Claudia, and heaven knows you have had opportunities enough to study that beast called man!"

"I love him, too," said Claudia. "Do you, Penelope?"

"Men please me," said the Scotch girl shyly. "I do not think them beasts."

"They bite," snapped Lady Johnson.

"Slap them," said Claudia,—"and that is all there is to it."

"You think any man ever has been tamed and the beast cast out of him, even after marriage?" demanded Lady Johnson. She smiled, but I caught the undertone of bitterness in her gaiety, poor girl!

"Before marriage," said Claudia coolly, "man is exactly as treacherous as he is afterward;—no more so, no less. What about it? You take the creature as he is fashioned by his Maker, or you drive him away and live life like a cloistered nun. What is your choice, Penelope?"

"I have no passion for a cloister," replied the girl, so candidly that all laughed, and she blushed prettily.

"That is best," nodded Claudia; "accept the creature as he is. We're fools if we're bitten before we're married, and fortunate if we're not nipped afterward. Anyway, I love men, and so God bless them, for they can't help being what they are and it's our own fault if they play too roughly and hurt us."

Lady Johnson laughed and laid her hand lightly on my shoulder.

"Dear Jack," said she, "we do not mean you, of course."

"Oho!" cried Claudia, "it's in 'em all and crops out one day. Jack Drogue is no tamer than the next man. Nay, I know the sort—meek as a mouse among petticoats——"

"Claudia!" protested Lady Johnson.

"I hear you, Polly. But when I solemnly swear to you that I have been afraid of this young man——"

"Afraid of what?" said I, smiling at her audacity, but vexed, too.

"Afraid you might undo me, Jack——"

"What!"

"—And then refuse me an honest name——"

"What mad nonsense do you chatter!" exclaimed Lady Johnson, out of countenance, yet laughing at Claudia's effrontery.

And Penelope, abashed, laughed a little, too. But Claudia's nonsense madded me, though her speech had been no broader than was fashionable among a gentry so closely in touch with London, where speech, and manners, too, were broader still.

Vexed to be made her silly butt, I sat gazing out of the window, over the great Vlaie, where, in the reeds, tall herons stood as stiff as driven stakes, and the painted wood-ducks, gorgeous as tropic birds, breasted Mayfield Creek, or whirred along the waterways to and fro between the Stacking Ridge and the western bogs, where they nested among trees that sloped low over the water.

Beyond, painted blue mountains ringed the vast wilderness of bog and woods and water; and presently I was interested to see, on the blunt nose of Maxon, a stain of smoke.

I watched it furtively, paying only a civil heed to the women's chatter around me—watched it with sideway glance as I dipped my spoon into the smoking soupaan and crumbled my johnny-cake.

At first, on Maxon's nose there was only a slight blue tint of vapour, like a spot of bloom on a blue plum. But now, above the mountain, a thin streak of smoke mounted straight up; and presently I saw that it became jetted, rising in rings for a few moments.

Suddenly it vanished.

Claudia was saying that one must assume all officers of either party to be gentlemen; but Lady Johnson entertained the proposition coldly, and seemed unwilling to invite Continental officers to a dish of tea.

"Not because they are my captors and have driven my husband out of his own home," she said haughtily; "I could overlook that, because it is the fortune of war. But it is said that the Continental officers are a parcel of Yankee shop-keepers, and I have no desire to receive such people on equal footing."

"But," said Claudia, "Jack is a rebel officer, and so is Billy Alexander."

"I think Lord Stirling must be crazy," retorted Lady Johnson. Then she looked at me, bit her lip and laughed, adding:

"You, too, Jack—and every gentleman among you must be mad to flout our King!"

"Mad, indeed—and therefore to be pitied, not punished," says Claudia. "Therefore, let us drink tea with our rebel officers, Polly—out of sheer compassion for their common infirmity."

"We rebels don't drink tea, you know," said I, smiling.

"Oh, la! Wait till we invite your Continentals yonder. For, if Polly and I are to be imprisoned here, I vow I mean to amuse myself with the likeliest of these young men in blue and buff, whom I can see yonder, stalking to and fro along the Johnstown Road. May I not send them a civil invitation, Polly?"

"If you insist. I, however, decline to meet them," pouted Lady Johnson.

"I shall write a little letter to their commanding officer," quoth Claudia. "Do as you like, Polly, but, as for me, I do not desire to perish of dullness with only women to talk to, and only a swamp to gaze upon!"

She sprang to her feet; Lady Johnson and Penelope also rose, as did I.

"Is it true, Jack, that you are under promise to take this young girl to Douw Fonda's house in Caughnawaga?" asked Lady Johnson.

"Yes, madam."

She turned to Penelope: "When do you desire to set out?"

"As soon as may be, my lady."

"I like you. I wish you would remain and share my loneliness."

"I would, my lady, only I feel in honour bound to go to Mr. Fonda."

Claudia passed her arm around the Scottish girl's slim waist.

"Come," she coaxed, "be my companion! Be more friend than servant, more sister than friend. For I, also, begin to love you, with your dark eyes and yellow hair, and your fine hands and sweet, fresh skin, like a child from a bath."

They both laughed, looking at each other with a gaze shy but friendly, like two who seem to think they are, perhaps, destined to love each other.

"I wish I might remain," said the Scottish girl, reluctantly turning toward me.

"Are you for Caughnawaga?" I asked bluntly.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well," said I. "Polly Johnson, may I take your carriage?"

"It is always at your command, Jack. But I am sorry that our little Scottish lass must go."

However, she gave the order to black Colas, who must drive us, also, because, excepting for Colas and poor Flora, and one slave left in Johnstown, all servants, slaves, tenants, and officers of Sir John's household had fled with the treacherous Baronet

and were now God knows where in the terrific wilderness and making, without doubt, for the Canadas.

For personal reasons I was glad that the dishonoured man was gone. I should have been ashamed to take him prisoner. But I was deeply troubled on other accounts; for this man had gone northward with hundreds of my old neighbors, for the purpose of forming an army of white men and Indians, with which he promised to return and cut our throats and lay our beautiful countryside in ashes.

We had scarce any force to oppose Sir John; no good forts except Stanwix and a few block-housen; our newly-organized civil government was chaotic; our militia untried, unreliable, poorly armed, and still rotten with toryism.

To defend all this immense Tryon County frontier, including the river as far as Albany, only one regular regiment had been sent to help us; for what remained of the State Line was needed below, where His Excellency was busy massing an army to face the impending thunder-clap from England.

As I stood by the window, looking out across the Vlaie at Maxon Ridge, where I felt very sure that hostile eyes were watching the Sacandaga and this very house, a hand touched my arm, and, turning, I saw Penelope Grant beside me.

"May I have a word alone with you, Mr. Drogue?" she asked in her serious and graver way—a way as winning as her lighter mood, I thought.

So we went out to the veranda and walked a little way among the apple trees, slowly, I waiting to hear what she had for my ear alone.

Beyond, by the well, I saw my Rangers squatting cross-legged on the grass in a little circle, playing at stick-knife. Beyond them a Continental soldier paced his beat in front of the gate which closed the mainland road.

Birds sang, sunshine glimmered on the water, the sky was softly blue.

The girl had paused under a fruit tree. Now, she pulled down an apple branch and set her nose to the blossoms, breathing their fresh scent.

"Well," said I, quietly.

Her level eyes met mine across the flowering branch.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said she.

"How disturb me?"

"By obliging you to take me to Caughnawaga. It inconveniences you."

"I promised to see you safely there, and that is all about it," said I drily.

"Yes, sir. But I ask your pardon for exacting your promise. . . . And—I ask pardon for—for stealing your horse."

There seemed to ensue a longer silence than I intended, and I realized that I had been looking at her without other thought than of her dark, young eyes under her yellow hair.

"What did you say?" I asked absently.

She hesitated, then: "You do not like me, Mr. Drogue."

"Did I say so?" said I, startled.

"No. . . . I feel that you do not like me. Is it because I used you without decency when I stole your horse?"

"Perhaps some trifling chagrin remains. But it is now over—because you say you are sorry."

"I am so."

"Then—I am friendly—if you so desire, Penelope Grant."

"Yes, sir, I do desire your countenance."

I smiled at her gravity, and saw, dawning in return, that lovely, child's smile I already knew and waited for.

"I wish to whisper to you," said she, bending the flowering bough lower.

So I inclined my ear across it, and felt her delicate breath against my cheek.

"I wish to make known to you that I am of your party, Mr. Drogue," she whispered.

I nodded approval.

"I wished you to know that I am a friend to liberty," she continued. "My sentiment is very ardent, Mr. Drogue: I burn with desire to serve this land, to which my father's wish has committed me. I am young, strong, not afraid. I can load and shoot a pistol——"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, laughing, "do you wish to enlist and go for a soldier?"

"Yes, sir."

I drew back in amazement and looked at her, and she blushed but made me a firm countenance. And so sweetly solemn a face did this maid pull at me that I could not forbear to laugh again.

"But how about Mr. Fonda?" I demanded, "if you don jackboots and hanger and go for a dragoon?"

"I shall ask his permission to serve my country."

"A-horse, Penelope? Or do you march with fire-lock and knap-

sack and a well-floured queue?" I had meant to turn it lightly but not to ridicule; but her lip quivered, though she still found courage to sustain my laughing gaze.

"Come," said I, "we Tryon County men have as yet no need to call upon our loyal women to shoulder rifle and fill out our ranks."

"No need of me, sir?"

"Surely, surely, but not yet to such a pass that we strap a bayonet on your thigh. Sew for us. Knit for us——"

"Sir, for three years I have done so, foreseeing this hour. I have knitted many, many score o' stockings; sewed many a shirt against this day that is now arrived. I have them in Mr. Fonda's house, against my country's needs. All, or a part, are at your requisition, Mr. Drogue."

But I remained mute, astonished that this girl had seen so clearly what so few saw at all—that war must one day come between us and our King. This foreseeing of hers amazed me even more than her practical provision for the day of wrath—now breaking red on our horizon—that she had seen so clearly what must happen—a poor refugee—a child.

"Sir," says she, "have you any use for the stockings and shirts among your men?"

She stood resting both arms on the bent bough, her face among the flowers. And I don't know how I thought of it, or remembered that in Scotland there are some who have the gift of clear vision and who see events before they arrive—nay, even foretell and forewarn.

And, looking at her, I asked her if that were true of her. And saw the tint of pink apple bloom stain her face; and her dark eyes grow shy and troubled.

"Is it that way with you?" I repeated. "Do you see more clearly than ordinary folk?"

"Yes, sir—sometimes."

"Not always?"

"No, sir."

"But if you desire to penetrate the future and strive to do so——"

"No, sir, I can not if I try. Visions come unsought—even undesired."

"Is effort useless?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then this strange knowledge of the future comes of itself, unbidden?"

"Unbidden—when it comes at all. It is like a flash—then darkness. But the glimpse has convinced me, and I am forewarned."

I pondered this for a space, then:

"Could you tell me anything concerning how this war is to end?"

"I do not know, Mr. Drogue."

I considered. Then, again: "Have you any knowledge of what Fate intends concerning yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Nothing regarding your own future? That is strange."

She shook her head, watching me. And then I laughed lightly:

"Nothing, by any chance, concerning me, Penelope?"

"Yes."

I was so startled that I found no word to question her.

"There is to be a battle," she said in a low voice. "Men will fight in the North. I do not know when. But there will be strange uniforms in the woods—not British redcoats. . . . And I know you, also, are to be there." Her voice sank to a whisper. . . . "And there," she breathed, "you shall meet Death . . . or Love."

When presently my composure returned to me, and I saw her still regarding me across the apple-bough, I felt inclined to laugh.

"When did this strange knowledge come to you?" I asked, smiling my unbelief.

"The day I first heard your voice at my cousin Bowman's—waking me in my bed—and I came out and saw you in the eye of the rising sun. *And you were not alone.* And instantly I saw a strange battle that is not yet fought—and I saw you—the way you stood—there—dark and straight in a blinding sheet of yellow light made by cannon! . . . The world was aflame, and I saw you, tall and dark, shadowed against the blaze—but you did not fall.

"Then I came to my senses, and heard the bell ringing, and asked you what it meant. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

She released the apple-bough and came under it toward me, through a snow of falling blossoms.

"It will surely happen—this battle," she said. "I knew it when I saw you, and that other figure near you, where I sat your stolen horse and heard you shout at me in anger, and turned to look at you—then, also, I caught a glimpse of that *other* figure near you."

"What other figure?"

The one which was wrapped in white—like a winding sheet —and veiled. . . . Like Death. . . . Or a bride, perhaps."

A slight chill went over me, even in the warmth of the sun. But I laughed and said I knew not which would be the less welcome, having no stomach for Master Death, and even less, perhaps, for Mistress Bride.

"Doubtless," said I, "you saw some ghost of the morning mist afloat from the wet earth where I stood."

She made no answer.

Now, as the carriage still tarried, though I had seen Colas taking out the horses, I asked her indulgence for a few moments, and walked over to the well, where my men still sat at stick-knife. And here I called Nick aside and laid one hand on his shoulder:

"There was Indian smoke on Maxon an hour ago," said I. "Take Johnny Silver and travel the war trail north, but do not cross the creek to the east. I go as armed escort for a traveller to Caughnawaga, and shall return as soon as may be. Learn what you can and meet me here by sunrise tomorrow."

Nick grinned and cast a sidelong glance at Penelope Grant, where she stood in the orchard, watching us.

"Scotched by the Scotch," said he. "Adam fell; and so I knew you'd fall one day, John—in an apple orchard! Lord Harry! but she's a pretty baggage, too! Only take care, John! for she's soft and young and likes to be courted, and there's plenty to oblige her when you're away!"

"Let them oblige her then," said I, vexed, though I knew not why. "She stole my horse and would not surrender him until I pledged my word to give her escort back to Caughnawaga. And that is all my story—if it interests you."

"It does so," said he, his tongue in his cheek. At which I turned away in a temper, and encountered an officer, in militia regimentals of the Caughnawaga Regiment, coming through the orchard toward me.

"Hallo, Jack!" he called out to me, and I saw he was a friend of mine, Major Jelles Fonda, and hastened to offer him his officer's salute.

When he had rendered it, he gave me his honest hand, and we linked arms and walked together toward the house, exchanging gossip concerning how it went with our cause in Johnstown and Caughnawaga. For the Fonda clan was respectable and strong among the landed gentry of Tryon, and it meant much to the cause of liberty that all the Fondas, I think without exception,

had stood sturdily for their own people at a time when the vast majority of the influential and well-to-do had stood for their King.

When we drew near the house, Major Fonda perceived Penelope and went at once to her.

She dropped him a curtsey, but he took her hands and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I heard you were here," said he. "We sent old Douw Fonda to Albany for safety, not knowing what is like to come upon us out o' that damned Canada. And, knowing you had gone to your cousin Bowman's, I rode over to my Bush, got news of you through a Mayfield militia man, and trailed you here. And now, my girl, you may take your choice; go to Albany and sit snug with the Patroon until this tempest breaks and blows over, or go to Johnstown Fort with me."

"Does not Douw Fonda need me?" she asked.

"Only your pretty face and sweet presence to amuse him. But, until we are certain that Sir John and Guy Johnson do not mean to return and murder us in our beds, Douw Fonda will not live in Caughnawaga, and so needs no housekeeper."

"Why not remain here with Lady Johnson and Mistress Swift," said I, "until we learn what to expect from Sir John and his friends in Canada? These ladies are alone and in great anxiety and sorrow. And you could be of aid and service and comfort."

What made me say this I do not know. But, somehow, I did not seem to wish this girl to go to Albany, where there were many gay young men and much profligacy.

To sit on Douw Fonda's porch with her knitting was one thing, and the sap-pan gallants had little opportunity to turn the head of this inexperienced girl; but Albany was a very different matter; and this maid, who said that she liked men, alone there with only an aged man to stand between her and idle, fashionable youth, might very easily be led into indiscretions. The mere thought of which caused me so lively a vexation that I was surprised at myself.

And now I perceived the carriage, with horses harnessed, and Colas in a red waistcoat and a red and green cockade on his beaver.

We walked together to the Summer House. Lady Johnson came out on the veranda, and Claudia followed her.

When they saw Major Fonda, they bowed to him very coolly, and he made them both a stately salute, shrugged his epaulettes, and took snuff.

Lady Johnson said to Penelope: "Are you decided on abandoning two lonely women to their own devices, Penelope?"

"Do you really mean to leave me, who could love you very dearly?" demanded Claudia, coming down and taking the girl by both hands.

"If you wish it, I am now at liberty to remain with you till Mr. Fonda sends for me," replied Penelope. "But I have no clothes."

Claudia embraced her with rapture. "Come to my room, darling!" she cried, "and you shall divide with me every stitch I own! And then we shall dress each other's hair! Shall we not? And we shall be very fine to drink a dish of tea with our friends, the enemy, yonder!"

She flung her arm around Penelope. Going, the girl looked around at me. "Thank you for great kindness, my lord," she called back softly.

Lady Johnson said in a cold voice to Major Fonda: "If our misfortunes have not made us contemptible to you, sir, we are at home to receive any enemy officer who, like yourself, Major, chances to be also a gentleman."

"Damnation, Polly!" says he with a short laugh, "don't treat an old beau to such stiff-neck language! You know cursed well I'd go down on both knees and kiss your shoes, though I'd kick the King's shins if I met him!"

He passed his arm through mine; we both bowed very low, then went away together, arm in arm, the Major fuming under his breath.

"Silly baggage," he muttered, "to treat an old friend so high and mighty. Dash it, what's come over these Johnstown gentlemen and ladies. Can't we fight one another politely but they must affect to treat us as dirt beneath their feet, who once were welcome at their tables?"

At the well I called to my men, who got up from the grass and greeted Major Fonda with unmilitary familiarity.

"Major," said I, "we're off to scout the Sacandaga trail and learn what we can. It's cold sniffing, now, on Sir John's heels, but there was Iroquois smoke on old Maxon this morning, and I should like at least to poke the dead ashes of that same fire before moonrise."

"Certainly," said the Major, gravely; and we shook hands.

"Now, Nick," said I briskly.

"Ready," said he; and "Ready!" repeated every man.

So, rifle a-trail, I led the way out into the Fish House road.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DROWNED LANDS

FOR two weeks my small patrol of six remained in the vicinity of the Sacandaga, scouting even as far as Stony Creek, Silver Lake, and West River, covering Maxon, too, and the Drowned Lands, but ever hovering about the Sacandaga, where the great Iroquois War Trail runs through the dusk of primeval woods.

But never a glimpse of Sir John did we obtain. Which was scarcely strange, inasmuch as the scent was already stone cold when we first struck it. And though we could trace the Baronet's headlong flight for three days' journey, by his dead fires and stinking camp débris, and, plainer still, by the trampled path made by his men and horses and by the wheel-marks of at least one cannon, our orders, which were to stop the War Trail from Northern enemies, permitted no further pursuit.

Yet, given permission, I think I could have come up with him and his motley forces, though what my six scouts could have accomplished against nearly two hundred people is but idle surmise. And whether, indeed, we could have contrived to surprise and capture Sir John, and bring him back to justice, is a matter now fit only for idlest speculation.

At the end of the first week I sent Joe de Golyer and Godfrey Shew into Johnstown to acquaint Colonel Dayton of what we had seen and what we guessed concerning Sir John's probable route. DeLuysnes and Johnny Silver I stationed on Maxon's honest nose, where the valley of the Sacandaga and the Drowned Lands lay like a vast map at their feet, while Nick Stoner and I prowled the silent Iroquois trail or slid like a pair of otters through the immense desolation of the Drowned Lands, from the jungle-like recesses of which we could see the distant glitter of muskets where our garrison was drilling at Fish House, and a white speck to the southward, which marked the little white and green lodge at Summer House Point.

We had found a damaged birch canoe near the Stacking Ridge, and I think it was the property of John Howell, who lived on the

opposite side of the creek a mile above. But his log house stood bolted and empty; and, as he was a very rabid Tory, we helped ourselves to his old canoe, and Nick patched it with gum and made two paddles.

In this leaky craft we threaded the spectral Drowned Lands, penetrating every hidden water-lead, every concealed creek, every lost pond which glimmered unseen amid cranberry bogs, vast wastes of stunted willow, pinxter shrubs in bloom, and the endless wilderness of reeds. Nesting black-ducks rose on clattering wings in scores and scores at our stealthy invasion; herons and bitterns flapped heavily skyward; great chain-pike, as long as a young boy, slid like shadows under our dipping paddles. But we saw no Indians.

Nor was there a sign of any canoe amid the Drowned Lands; not a moccasin print in swamp-moss or mud; no trace of Iroquois on the Stacking Ridge, where already wild pigeons were flying among the beech and oak trees, busy with courtship and nesting.

It was now near the middle of June, but Nick thought that Sir John had not yet reached Canada, nor was like to accomplish that terrible journey through a pathless wilderness under a full month.

We know now that he did accomplish it in nineteen days, and arrived with his starving people in a terrible plight.* But nobody then supposed it possible that he could travel so quickly. Even his own Mohawks never dreamed he was already so far advanced on his flight; and this was their vital mistake; for there had been sent from Canada a war party to meet and aid Sir John; and, by hazard, I was to learn of this alarming business in a manner I had neither expected nor desired.

I was sitting on a great, smooth bowlder, where the little trout stream, which tumbles down Maxon from the east, falls into Hans Creek. It was a still afternoon and very warm in the sun, but pleasant there, where the confluence of the waters made a cool and silvery clashing-noise among the trees in full new leaf.

Nick had cooked dinner—parched corn and trout, which we caught in the brook with one of my fish hooks and a red wampum bead from my moccasins tied above the barb.

And now, dinner ended, Nick lay asleep with a mat of moss

* One of his abandoned brass cannon is—or recently was—lying embedded in a swamp in the North Woods.

over his face to keep off black flies, and I mounted guard, not because I apprehended danger, but desired not to break a military rule which had become already a habit among my handful of men.

I was seated, as I say, on a bowlder, with my legs hanging over the swirling water and my rifle across both knees. And I was thinking those vague and dreamy thoughts which float ghost-like through young men's minds when skies are blue in early summer and life seems but an endless vista through unnumbered æons to come.

Through a pleasant and reflective haze which possessed my mind moved figures of those I knew or had known—my honoured father, grave, dark-eyed, deliberate in all things, living for intellectual pleasure alone;—my dear mother, ardent yet timid, thrilled ever by what was most beautiful and best in the world, and loving all things made by God.

I thought, too, of my silly kinsman in Paris, Lord Stormont, and how I had declined his pompous patronage, to carve for myself a career, aided by the slender means afforded me; and how Billy Alexander did use me very kindly—a raw youth in a New York school, left suddenly orphaned and alone.

I thought of Stevie Watts, of Polly, of the DeLancys, Crugers, and other King's people who had made me welcome, doubtless for the sake of my Lord Stormont. And how I finally came to know Sir William Johnson, and his great kindness to me.

All these things I thought of in the golden afternoon, seated by Hans Creek, my eyes on duty, my thoughts a-gypsying far afield, where I saw, in my mind's eye, my log house in Fonda's Bush, my new-cleared land, my neighbors' houses, the dark walls of the forest.

Yet, drifting between each separate memory, glided ever a slender shape with yellow hair, and young, unfathomed eyes as dark as the velvet on the wings of that earliest of all our butterflies, which we call the Beauty of Camberwell.

Think of whom I might, or of what scenes, always this slim phantom drifted in between the sequences of thought, and vaguely I seemed to see her yellow hair, and that glimmer which sometimes came into her eyes, and which was the lovely dawning of her smile.

War seemed very far away, death but a fireside story half forgotten. For my thoughts were growing faintly fragrant with the scent of apple blossoms—white and pink bloom—sweet as her breath when she had whispered to me.

A strange young thing to haunt me with her fragrance—this girl Penelope—her smooth hands and snowy skin—and her little naked feet, like whitest silver there in the dew at Bowman's——

Suddenly, thought froze; from the foliage across the creek, scarce twenty feet from where I sat, and without the slightest sound, stepped an Indian in his paint.

Like a shot squirrel I dropped behind my bowlder and lay flat among the shore ferns, my heart so wild that my levelled rifle shook with the shock of palsy.

The roar of the waters was loud in my ears, but his calm voice came through it distinctly:

"Peace, brother!" he said in the soft, Oneida dialect, and lifted his right hand high in the sunshine, the open palm turned toward me.

"Don't move!" I called across the stream. "Lay your blanket on the ground and place your gun across it!"

Calmly he obeyed, then straightened up and stood there empty handed, naked in his paint, except for the beaded breadth of deer-skin that fell from belt to knee.

"Nick!" I called cautiously.

"I am awake and I have laid him over my rifle-sight," came Nick's voice from the woods behind me. "Look sharp, John, that there be not others ambuscaded along the bank."

"He could have killed me," said I, "without showing himself. By his paint I take him for an Oneida."

"That's Oneida paint," replied Nick, cautiously, "but it's war paint, all the same. Shall I let him have it?"

"Not yet. The Oneidas, so far, have been friendly. For God's sake, be careful what you do."

"Best parley quick then," returned Nick, "for I trust no Iroquois. You know his lingo. Speak to him."

I called across the stream to the Indian: "Who are you, brother? What is your nation and what is your clan, and what are you doing on the Sacandaga, with your face painted in black and yellow bars, and fresh oil on your limbs and lock?"

He said, in his quiet but distinct voice: "My nation is Oneida; my clan is the Tortoise; I am Tahioni. I am a young and inexperienced warrior. No scalp yet hangs from my girdle. I come as a friend. I come as my brother's ally. This is the reason that I seek my brother on the Sacandaga. Hiero! Tahioni has spoken."

And he quietly folded his arms.

He was a magnificent youth, quite perfect in limb and body, and as light of skin as the Mohawks, who are often nearly white, even when pure breed.

He stood unarmed, except for the knife and war-axe swinging from crimson-beaded sheaths at his cincture. Still, I did not rise or show myself, and my rifle lay level with his belly.

I said, in as good Oneida as I could muster:

"Young Oneida warrior, I have listened to what you have had to say. I have heard you patiently, oh Tahioni, my brother of the great Oneida nation who wears an *Onondaga name!*" For Tahioni means *The Wolf* in Onondaga dialect.

There was a silence, broken by Nick's low voice from somewhere behind me: "Shall I shoot the Onondaga dog?"

"Will you mind your business?" I retorted sharply.

The Oneida had smiled slightly at my sarcasm concerning his name; his eyes rested on the rock behind which I lay snug, stock against cheek.

"I am Tahioni," he repeated simply. "My mother's clan is the Onondaga Tortoise."

Which explained his clan and name, of course, if his father was Oneida.

"I continue to listen," said I warily.

"Tahioni has spoken," he said; and calmly seated himself.

For a moment I remained silent, yet still dared not show myself.

"Is my brother alone?" I asked at last.

"Two Oneida youths and my adopted sister are with me, brother."

"Where are they?"

"They are here."

"Let them show themselves," said I, instantly bitten by suspicion.

Two young men and a girl came calmly from the thicket and stood on the bank. All carried blanket and rifle. At a sign from Tahioni, all three laid their blankets at their feet and placed their rifles across them.

One, a stocky, powerful youth, spoke first:

"I am Kwiyeh.* My clan is the Oneida Tortoise."

The other young fellow said: "Brother, I am Hanatoh,† of the Oneida Tortoise."

Then they calmly seated themselves.

* The Screech-Owl.
† The Water-Snake.

I rose from my cover, my rifle in the hollow of my left arm. Nick came from his bed of juniper and stood looking very hard at the Oneidas across the stream.

Save for the girl, all were naked except for breech-clout, sporran, and ankle moccasins; all were oiled and in their paint, and their heads shaven, leaving only the lock. There could be no doubt that this was a war party. No doubt, also, that they could have slain me very easily where I sat, had they wished to do so.

There was, just below us, a string of rocks crossing the stream. I sprang from one to another and came out on their bank of the creek; and Nick followed, leaping the boulders like a lithe tree-cat.

The Oneidas, who had been seated, rose as I came up to them. I gave my hand to each of them in turn, until I faced the girl. And then I hesitated.

For never anywhere, among any nation of the Iroquois Confederacy, had I seen any woman so costumed, painted, and accoutred.

For this girl looked more like a warrior than a woman; and, save for her slim and hard young body's shape, and her full hair, must have passed for an adolescent wearing his first hatchet and his first touch of war paint.

She, also, was naked to the waist, her breasts scarce formed. Two braids of hair lay on her shoulders, and her skin was palely bronzed and smooth in its oil, as amber without a flaw.

But she wore leggins of doe-skin, deeply fringed with pale green and cinctured in at her waist, where war-axe and knife hung on her left thigh, and powder horn and bullet pouch on her right. And over these she wore knee moccasins of green snake-skin, the feet of which were deer-hide sewn thick with scarlet, purple, and greenish wampum, which glistened like a humming-bird's throat.

I said, wondering: "Who is this girl in a young warrior's dress, who wears a disk of blue war-paint on her forehead?"

But Nick pulled my arm and said in my ear:

"Have you heard of the little maid of Askalege? Yonder she stands, thank God! For the Oneida follow their prophetess; and the Oneida are with us in this war if she becomes our friend!"

I had heard of the little Athabasca girl, found in the forest by Skenandoa and Spencer, and how she grew up like a boy at Askalege, with the brave half-breed interpreter, Thomas Spencer; and how it was her delight to roam the forests and talk—they

said—to trees and beasts by moonlight; how she knew the language of all things living, and could hear the tiny voices of the growing grass! Legends and fairy tales, but by many believed.

Yet, Sir William had seen the child at Askalege dancing in the stream of sparks that poured from Spencer's smithy when the Oneida blacksmith pumped his home-made bellows or struck fire-flakes from the cherry-red iron.

I said: "Are you sure, Nick? For never have I seen an Indian maid play boy in earnest."

"She is the little witch-maid of Askalege—their prophetess," he repeated. "I saw her once at Oneida Lake, dancing on the shore amid a whirl of yellow butterflies at their strawberry feast. God send she favours our party, for the Oneidas will follow her."

I turned to the girl, who was standing quietly beside a young silver birch-tree.

"Who are you, my sister, who wear a little blue moon on your brow, and the dress and weapons of an adolescent?"

"Brother," she said in her soft Oneida tongue, "I am an Athabascan of the Heron Clan, adopted into the Oneida nation. My name is Thiohero,* and my privilege is Oyaneh.† Brother, I come as a friend to liberty, and to help you fight your great war against your King.

"Brother, I have spoken," she concluded, with lowered eyes.

Surprised and charmed by this young girl's modesty and quiet speech, but not knowing how to act, I thanked her as I had the young men, and offered her my hand.

She took it, lifted her deep, wide eyes unabashed, looked me calmly and intelligently in the face, and said in English:

"My adopted father is Thomas Spencer, the friend to liberty, and Oneida interpreter to your General Schuyler. My adopted uncle is the great war-chief Skenandoa, also your ally. The Oneida are my people. And are now become your brothers in this new war."

"Your words make our hearts light, my sister."

"Your words brighten our sky, my elder brother."

Our clasped hands fell apart. I turned to Tahioni:

"Brother, why are you in battle-paint?" I demanded.

At that the eyes of the Oneida youths began to sparkle and

* The River-reed.

† The noble or honourable one. The feminine of Royaneh, or Sachem, in the Algonquin.

burn; and Tahioni straightened up and struck the knife-hilt at his belt with a quick, fierce gesture.

"Give me a name that I may know my brother," he said bluntly. "Even a tree has a name." And I flushed at this merited rebuke.

"My name is John Drogue, and I am lieutenant of our new State Rangers," said I. "And this is my comrade, Nicholas Stoner, of Fonda's Bush, and first sergeant in my little company."

"Brother John," said he, "then listen to this news we Oneidas bring from the North: a Canada war-party is now on the Iroquois trail, looking for Sir John to guide them to the Canadas!"

Taken aback, I stared at the young warrior for a moment, then, recovering composure, I translated for Nick what he had just told me.

Then I turned again to Tahioni, the Wolf:

"Where is this same war-party?" I demanded, still scarce convinced.

"At West River, near the Big Eddy," said he. *"They have taken scalps."*

"Why—why, then, it *is* war!" I exclaimed excitedly. "And what people are these who have taken scalps in the North? Are they Caniengas?"

"Mohawks!" He fairly spat out the insulting term, which no friendly Iroquois would dream of using to a Canienga; and the contemptuous word seemed to inflame the other Oneidas, for they all picked up their rifles and crowded around me, watching my face with gleaming eyes.

"How many?" I asked, still a little stunned by this reality, though I had long foreseen the probability.

"Thirty," said the girl Thiohero, turning from Nick, to whom she had been translating what was being said in the Oneida tongue.

Now, in a twinkling, I found myself faced with an instant crisis, and must act as instantly.

I had two good men on Maxon, the French trapper, Johnny Silver and Benjamin De Luysnes; Nick and I counted two more. With four Oneida, and perhaps Joe de Golyer and Godfrey Shew —if we could pick them up on the Vlaie—we would be ten stout men to stop this Mohawk war-party until the garrisons at Summer House Point and Fish House could drive the impudent marauders North again.

Turning to Thiohero, I said as much in English. She nodded

and spoke to the others in Oneida; and I saw their eager and brilliant eyes begin to glitter.

Now, I carried always with me in the bosom of my buckskin shirt a *carnet,* or tablet of good paper, and a pencil given me years ago by Sir William.

And now I seated myself on a rock and took my instruments and wrote:

"Hans Creek, near
Maxon Brook,
June 13th, 1776.

"To the Officer commd'ng ye
Garrison at ye Summer House
on Vlaie,

"Sir:

"I am to acquaint you that this day, about two o'clock, afternoon, arrived in my camp four Oneidas who give an account that a Mohawk War Party is now at ye Big Eddy on West River, headed south.

"By the same intelligence I am to understand that this War Party *has taken scalps.*

"Sir, anybody familiar with the laws and customs of the Iroquois Confederacy understands what this means.

"Murder, or mere slaying, when not accompanied by such mutilation, need not constitute an act of war involving nation and Confederacy in formal declaration.

"But the taking of a single scalp means only one thing: that the nation whose warrior scalps an enemy approves the trophy and declares itself at war with the nation of the victim.

"I am aware, sir, that General Schuyler and Mr. Kirkland and others are striving mightily in Albany to placate the Iroquois, and that they still entertain such hope, although the upper Mohawks are gone off with Brant, and Guy Johnson holds in his grasp the fighting men of the Confederacy, save only the Oneida, and also in spite of news, known to be certain, that Mohawk Indians were in battle-paint at St. John's.

"Now, therefore, conscious of my responsibility, and asking God's guidance in this supreme moment, lest I commit error or permit hot blood to confuse my clearer mind, I propose to travel instantly to the West River with my scout of four Rangers, and four Oneidas, and ask of this Mohawk War Party an explanation in the name of the Continental Congress and His Excellency, our Com'nder in Chief.

"Sir, I doubt not that you will order your two garrisons to prepare for immediate defense, and also to support my scout on the Sacandaga; and to send an express to Johnstown as soon as may be, to acquaint Colonel Dayton of what measures I propose to take to carry out my orders which are *to stop the Sacandaga trail.*

"This, sir, it is my present endeavour to do.

"I am, sir, with all respect,

"Yr most obedient

"John Drogue, Lieut Rangers."

When I finished, I discovered that Nick and the Oneidas had fastened on their blanket-packs and were gathered a little distance away in animated conversation, the little maid of Askalege translating.

Nick had fetched my pack; I strapped it, picked up my rifle, and walked swiftly into the woods; and without any word from me they fell into file at my heels, headed west for Fish House and the fateful river.

My scout of six moved very swiftly and without noise; and it was not an hour before I caught sight of a Continental soldier on bullock guard, and saw cattle among low willows.

The soldier was scared and bawled lustily for his mates; but among them was one of the Sammons, who knew me; and they let us through with little delay.

Fish House was full o' soldiers a-sunning in every window, and under them, on the grass; and here headquarters guards stopped us until the captain in command could be found, whilst the gaping Continentals crowded around us for news, and stared at our Oneidas, whose quiet dignity and war paint astonished our men, I think. To the west and south, and along the river, I saw many soldiers in their shirts, a-digging to make an earthwork; and presently from this redoubt came a Continental Captain, out o' breath, who listened anxiously to what news I had gathered, and who took my letter and promised to send it by an express to Summer House Point.

A quartermaster's sergeant asked very civilly if I desired to draw rations for my scout; and I drew parched corn, salt, dried fish, jerked venison, and pork from the brine, for ten men; and Nick and I and my Oneidas did divide between us the burthen.

"The dogs!" he kept repeating in a confused way—"the dirty dogs, to take our scalps! And I pray God your painted Oneidas yonder may do the like for them!"

I saw a horse saddled and a soldier mount and gallop off with my letter. That was sufficient for me; I gave the Continental Captain the officers' salute, and looked around at my men, who had made a green fire for me on the grass in front of the house.

It was smoking thickly, now, so I took a soldier's watch-coat by the skirts, glanced up at Maxon Ridge, then, flinging wide the garment above the fire, kept it a-flutter there and moved it up and down till the jetted smoke mounted upward in great clots, three together, then one, then three, then one.

Presently, high on Maxon, I saw smoke, and knew that Johnny Silver understood. So I flung the watch-coat to the soldier, turned, and walked swiftly along the river bank, where sheep grazed, then entered the forest with Nick at my heels and the four Oneidas a-padding in his tracks.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LITTLE RED FOOT

BY dusk we were ten rifles; for an hour after we left Fish House Johnny Silver and Luysnes joined us on the Sacandaga trail; and, just as the sun set behind the Mayfield mountains, comes rushing down stream a canoe with Godfrey Shew's bow-paddle flashing red in the last rays and Joe de Golyer steering amid the rattling rapids, nigh buried in a mountain of silvery spray.

And here, by the river, we ate, but lighted no fire, though it seemed safe to do so.

I sent Godfrey Shew and the Water-snake far up the Iroquois trail to watch it. The others gathered in a friendly circle to munch their corn and jerked meat, and the Frenchmen were merry, laughing and jesting and casting sly, amorous eyes toward Thiohero, who laughed, too, in friendly fashion and was at her ease and plainly not displeased with gallantry.

It had proved a swift comradery between us and our young Oneidas, and I marvelled at the rapid accomplishment of such friendly accord in so brief a time, yet understood it came through the perfect faith of these Oneidas in their young Athabasca witch; and that what their prophetess found good they did not even think of questioning.

Her voice was soft, her smile bewitching; she ate with the healthy appetite of an animal, yet was polite to those who offered meat. And her sweet "neah-wennah" * never failed any courtesy offered by these rough Forest Runners, who now, for the first time in their reckless lives, I think, were afforded a glimpse of the forest Indian as he really is when at his ease and among friends.

For it is not true that the Iroquois live perpetually in their paint; that they are cruel by nature, brutal, stern, and masters of silence; or that they stalk gloomily through life with hatchet ever loosened and no pursuit except war in their ferocious minds.

White men who have mistreated them see them so; but the

* Thank you.

real Iroquis, except the Senecas, who are different, are naturally a kindly, merry, and trustful people among themselves, not quarrelsome, not fierce, but like children, loving laughter and all things gay and bright and mischievous.

Their women, though sometimes broad in speech and jests, are more truly chaste in conduct than the women of any nation I ever heard of, except the Irish.

They have their fixed and honourable places in clan, nation, and Federal affairs.

Rank follows the female line; the son of a chief does not succeed to the antlers, but any of his mother's relatives may. And in the Great Rite of the Iroquois, which is as sacred to them as is our religion to us, and couched in poetry as beautiful as ever Homer sang, the most moving part of the ceremony concerns the Iroquois women,—the women of the Six Nations of the Long House, respected, honoured, and beloved.

We ate leisurely, feeling perfectly secure there in the starlight of the soft June night.

The Iroquois war-trail ran at our elbows, trodden a foot deep, hard as a sheep path, and from eighteen inches to two feet in width—a clean, firm, unbroken trail through a primeval wilderness, running mile after mile, mile after mile, over mountains, through valleys, by lonely lakes, along lost rivers, to the distant Canadas in the North.

On this trail, above us, two of my men lay watching, as I have said, which was merely a customary precaution, for we were far out of earshot of the Big Eddy, and even of our own sentries.

We were like one family eating together, and Silver and Luysnes jested and played pranks on each other, and de Golyer and Nick entered into gayest conversation with the Oneidas through their interpreter, the River-reed.

As for Nick, I saw him making calf's eyes at the lithe young sorceress, which I perceived displeased her not at all; yet she gaily divided herself between translating for the others and keeping up a lively repartee with Nick.

The Oneidas, now, had begun to shine up their war-hatchets, sitting cross-legged and contentedly rubbing up knife, axe, and rifle; and I was glad to see them so at home and so confident of our friendship.

Older men might not have been so easily won, but these untried young warriors seemed very children, and possessing the lovable

qualities of children, being alternately grave and gay, serious and laughing, frank and impatient, yet caressing in speech and gesture.

From Kwiyeh, the Screech-owl, I had an account of how, burning for glory, these four youngsters had stolen away from Oneida Lake, and, painting themselves, had gone North of their own accord, to win fame for the Oneida nation, which for the greater part had espoused our cause.

He told me that they had seen Sir John pass, floundering madly northward and dragging three brass cannon; but explained naïvely that four Oneidas considered it unsafe to give battle to two hundred white men.

For a week, however, it appeared, they had hung on Sir John's flanks, skulking for a stray scalp; but it was evident that the Baronet's people were thoroughly frightened, and the heavy flank guards and the triple line of sentries by night made any hope of a stray scalp futile.

Then, it appeared, these four Oneidas gave up the quest and struck out for the Iroquois trail. And suddenly came upon nearly two score Mohawks, silently passing southward, painted for war, oiled, shaved, and stripped, and evidently searching for Sir John, to aid and guide him in his flight to Canada.

Which proved to me the Baronet's baseness, because his flight was plainly a premeditated one, and the Mohawks could not have known of it unless Sir John had been in constant communication with Canada—a thing he had pledged his honour not to do.

Others around me, now, were listening to the burly young Oneida's account of their first war-path; and presently their young sorceress took up the tale in English and in Oneida, explaining with lively gestures to both red men and white.

"Not one of the Mohawks saw us," she said scornfully, "and when they made a camp and had sent their hunters out to kill game, we came so near that we could see their warriors curing and hooping the scalps they had taken and painting on every scalp the Little Red Foot *—even on the scalps of two little boys."

Nick turned pale, but said nothing. A sickness came to my stomach and I spoke with difficulty.

"What were these scalps, little sister, which you saw the Mohawks curing?"

"White people's. Three were of men,—one very thin and gray; two were the glossy hair of women; and two the scalps of children——"

* To show that the late owner of the scalp had died fighting bravely.

She flung back her blanket with a peculiarly graceful gesture: "Be honoured, O white brothers, that these Mohawk dogs were forced to paint upon every scalp the Little Red Foot!"

After a silence: "Some poor settler's family," muttered Nick; and fell a-fiddling with his hatchet.

"All died fighting," I added in a dull voice.

Thiohero snapped her fingers and her dark eyes flamed.

"What are the Mohawks, after all!" she said in a tense voice. "Who are they, to paint for war without fire-right given them at Onondaga? What do they amount to, these Keepers of the Eastern Gate, since Sir William died?

"They have become outlaws and there is no honour among them!

"Their clan-right is destroyed and neither Wolf, Bear, nor Tortoise know them any longer. Nor does any ensign of my own clan of the Heron know these mad yellow wolves that howl and tear the Long House with their teeth to destroy it! Like carcajoux, they defile the Iroquois League and smother its fire in their filth! Dig up the ashes of Onondaga for any living ember, O you Oneidas! You shall find not one live spark! And this is what the Canienga have done to the Great Confederacy!"

Tahioni said, looking straight ahead of him: "The Great League of the Iroquois is broken. Skenandoa has said it, and he has painted his face scarlet! The Long House crumbles slowly to its fall.

"Those who should have guarded the Eastern Gate have broken it down. Death to the Canienga!"

Kwiyeh lifted his right hand high in the starlight:

"Death to the Canienga! They have defiled Thendara. Spencer has said it. They have spat upon the Fire at the Wood's Edge. They have hewn down the Great Tree. They have uncovered the war-axe which lay deep buried under the roots.

"Death to the Canienga!"

I turned to Thiohero: "O River-reed, my little sister! Oyaneh! Is it true that your great chief, Skenandoa, has put on red paint?"

She said calmly: "It is true, my brother. Skenandoa has painted himself in red. And when your General Herkimer rides into battle, on his right hand rides Skenandoa; and on his left hand rides Thomas Spencer, the Oneida interpreter!" *

Tahioni said solemnly: "And before them rides the Holder of Heaven. We Oneidas can not doubt it. Is it true, my sister?"

The girl answered: "The Holder of Heaven has flung a red

* This was a true prophecy for it happened later at Oriskany.

wampum belt between Oneida and Canienga! Five more red belts remain in his hand. They are so brightly red that even the Senecas can see the colour of these belts from the Western Gate of the Long House."

There was a silence; then I chose De Luysnes and Kwiyeh to relieve our sentinels, and went north with them along the star-lit trail.

When I returned with Hanoteh and Godfrey Shew, the Oneidas were still sitting up in their blankets, and the Frenchmen lay on theirs, listening to Nick, who had pulled his fife from his hunting shirt and was trilling the air of the Little Red Foot while Joe de Golyer sang the words of the endless and dreary ballad—old-time verses, concerning bloody deeds of the Shawanese, Western Lenape, and French in '56, when blood ran from every creek and man, woman and child went down to death fighting.

I hated the words, but the song had ever haunted me with its quaint and sad refrain:

"Lord Loudon he weareth a fine red coat,
And red is his ladye's foot-mantelle;
Red flyeth ye flagge from his pleasure-boat,
And red is the wine he loves so well:
But, oh! for the dead at Minden Town,—
Naked and bloody and black with soot,
Where the Lenni-Lenape and the French came down
To paint them all with the Little Red Foot!"

"For God's sake, quit thy piping, Nick," said I, "and let us sleep while we may, for we move again at dawn."

At which Nick obediently tucked away his fife, and de Golyer, who had a thin voice like a tree-cat, held his songful tongue; and presently we all lay flat and rolled us in our blankets.

The night was still, save for a love-sick panther somewhere on the mountain, a-caterwauling under the June stars. But the distant and melancholy love-song and the golden melody of the stream pouring through its bowlders blended not unpleasantly in my ears, and presently conspired to lull me into slumber.

The mountain peaks were red when I awoke and spoke aloud to rouse my people. One by one they sat up, owlish with sleep, yet soon clearing their eyes and minds with remembering the business that lay before us.

I sent Joe de Golyer and Tahioni to relieve our sentinels, Luysnes and the Screech-owl.

When these came in with report that all was still as death on the Iroquois trail, we ate breakfast and drank at the river, where some among us also washed our bodies,—among others the River-reed, who stripped unabashed, innocent of any shame, and cleansed herself knee-deep in a crystal green pool under the Indian willows.

When she came back, the disk of blue paint was gone from her brow, and I saw her a-fishing in her beaded wallet and presently bring forth blue and red paint and a trader's mirror about two inches in diameter.

Then the little maid of Askalege sat down cross-legged and began to paint herself for battle.

At the root of her hair, where it made a point above her forehead, she painted a little crescent moon in blue. And touched no more her face; but on her belly she made a blue picture of a heron—her clan being the Heron, which is an ensign unknown among Iroquois.

Now she took red paint, and upon her chest she made a tiny human foot.

I was surprised, for neither for war nor for any ceremony ever heard of had I seen that dread symbol on any Indian.

The Oneidas, also, were looking at her in curiosity and astonishment, pausing in their own painting to discover what she was about.

Then, as it struck me, so, apparently, it came to them at the same instant what their sorceress meant,—what pledge to friend and foe alike this tiny red foot embodied, shining above her breast. And the two young warriors who had painted the tortoise in blue upon their bellies, now made each a little red foot upon their chests.

"By gar!" exclaimed Silver, "ees it onlee ze gens-du-bois who shall made a boast to die fighting? Nom de dieu, non!" And he unrolled his blanket and pulled out a packet of red cloth and thread and needle—which is like a Frenchman, who lacks for nothing, even in the wilderness.

He made a pattern very deftly out of his cloth, using the keen point of his hunting knife; and, as we all, now, wished to sew a little red foot upon the breasts of our buckskin shirts, and as he had cloth enough for all, and for Joe de Golyer, too, when we should come up with him, I and my men were presently

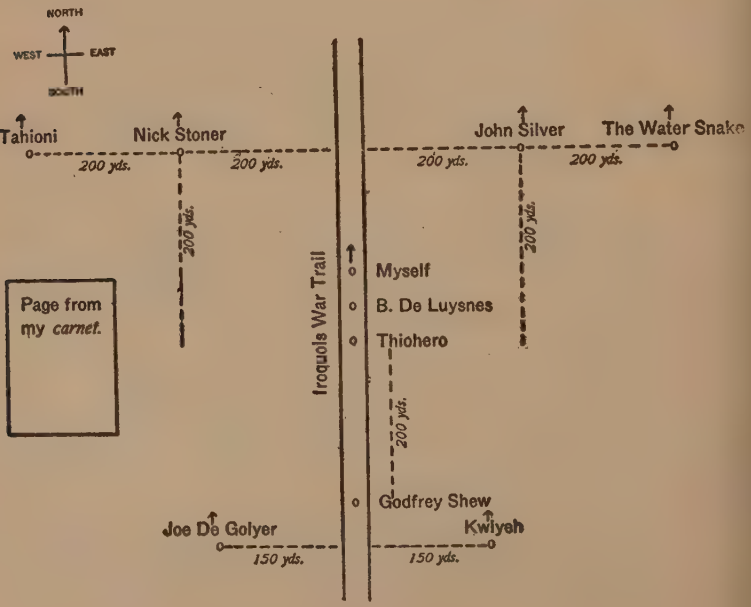
marked with the dread device, which was our pledge and our defiance.

The sun had painted scarlet the lower Adirondack peaks when we started north on the Sacandaga trail.

When we came up with our sentinels, I gave Joe time to sew on his symbol, and the Oneida time to paint it upon his person. Then we examined flint and priming, tightened girth and cincture, tested knife, hatchet, and the stoppers of our powder horns; and I went from one to another to inspect all, and to make my dispositions for the march to the Big Eddy on West River.

We marched in the following fashion: Tahioni and Nick as left flankers, two hundred yards in advance of us, and in sight of the trail. On the right flank, the Water-snake and Johnny Silver at the same intervals.

Then, on the trail itself, I leading, Luysnes next, then the River-reed. Then a hundred yards interval, and Joe de Golyer on the left rear, Kwiyeh on the right rear, and Godfrey on the trail.



"And," I said, "if you catch a roving Tree-eater, slay him not, but bring him to me, for if there be any of these wild rovers, the Montagnais, in our vicinity, they should know something of what is now happening in the Canadas, and they shall tell us what they know, or I'm a Tory! Forward! Our alarm signal is the long call-note of the Canada sparrow!"

CHAPTER XV

WEST RIVER

THE Water-snake caught an Adirondack just before ten o'clock, and was holding him on the trail as I came up, followed by Luysnes and Thiohero.

The Indian was a poor, starved-looking creature in ragged buckskins and long hair, from which a few wild-turkey quills fell to his scrawny neck.

He wore no paint, had been armed with a trade-rifle, the hammer of which was badly loosened and mended with copper wire, and otherwise he carried arrows in a quiver and a greasy bow.

Like a fierce, lean forest thing, made abject by fear, the Adirondack's sloe-black eyes now flickered at me, now avoided my gaze. I looked down at the rags which served him for a blanket, and on which lay his wretched arms, including knife and hatchet.

"Let him loose," said I to the Water-snake; "here is no Mengwe but a poor brother, who sees us armed and in our paint and is afraid."

And I went to the man and offered my hand. Which he touched as though I were a rattlesnake.

"Brother," said I, "we white men and Oneidas have no quarrel with any Saguenay that I know about. Our quarrel is with the Canienga, and that is the reason we wear paint on this trail. And we have stopped our Saguenay brother in the forest on his lawful journey, to say to him, and to all Saguenays, that we mean them no harm."

There was an absolute silence; Luysnes and Thiohero drew closer around the Tree-eater; the Water-snake gazed at his captive in slight disgust, yet, I noticed, held his rifle in a position for instant use.

The Saguenay's slitted eyes travelled from one to another, then he looked at me.

"Brother," I said, "how many Maquas are there camped near the Big Eddy?"

His low, thick voice answered in a dialect or language I did not comprehend.

"Can you speak Iroquois?" I demanded.

He muttered something in his jargon. Thiohero touched my arm:

"The Saguenay says he understands the Iroquois tongue, but can speak it only with difficulty. He says that he is a hunter and not a warrior."

"Ask him to answer me concerning the Maqua."

A burst of volubility spurted from the prisoner.

Again the girl translated the guttural reply:

"He says he saw painted Mohawks fishing in the Big Eddy, and others watching the trail. He does not know how many, because he can not count above five numbers. He says the Mohawks stoned him and mocked him, calling him Tree-eater and Woodpecker; and they drove him away from the Big Eddy, saying that no Saguenay was at liberty to fish in Canienga territory until permitted by the Canienga; and that unless he started back to Canada, where he belonged, the Iroquois women would catch him and beat him with nettles."

As Thiohero uttered the dread name, Canienga, I could see our captive shrink with the deep fear that the name inspired. And I think any Iroquois terrified him, for it seemed as though he dared not sustain the half-contemptuous, half-indifferent glances of my Oneidas, but his eyes shifted to mine in dumb appeal for refuge.

"What is my brother's name?" I asked.

"Yellow Leaf," translated the girl.

"His clan?"

"The Hawk," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Nevertheless," said I, very quietly, "my Saguenay brother is a man, and not an animal to be mocked by the Maqua!"

And I stooped and picked up his blanket and weapons, and gave them to him.

"The Saguenays are free people," said I. "The Yellow Leaf is free as is his clan ensign, the Hawk. Brother, go in peace!"

And I motioned my people forward.

Our flankers, who, keeping stations, had waited, now started on again, the Water-snake running swiftly to his post on the extreme right flank.

After ten minutes' silent and swift advance, Thiohero came lightly to my side on the trail.

"Brother," she whispered, "was it well considered to let loose that Tree-eating rover in our rear?"

"Would the Oneida take such a wretched trophy as that poor hunter's tangled scalp?"

"*Neah.* Yet, I ask again, was it wisdom to let him loose, who, for a mouthful of parched corn, might betray us to the Mengwe?"

"Poor devil, he means no harm to anybody."

"*Then why does he skulk after us?*"

Startled, I turned and caught a glimpse of something slinking on the ridge between our flankers; but was instantly reassured because no living thing could dog us without discovery from the rear. And presently I did see the Screech-owl run forward and hurl a clod of moss into the thicket; and the Saguenay broke cover like a scared dog, running perdue so that he came close to Hanatoh, who flung a stick at him.

That was too much for me; and, as the Tree-eater bolted past me, I seized him.

"Come," said I, dragging him along, "what the devil do you want of us? Did I not bid you go in peace?"

Thiohero caught him by the other arm, and he panted some jargon at her.

"Koué!" she exclaimed, and her long, sweet whistle of the Canada sparrow instantly halted us in our tracks, flankers, rear-guard, and all.

Thiohero, still holding the Saguenay by his lean, muscular arm, spoke sharply to him in his jargon; then, at his reply, looked up at me with the flaming eyes of a lynx.

"Brother," said she, "this Montagnais hunter has given an account that the Maquas have prepared an ambuscade, knowing we are on the Great Trail."

I said, coolly: "What reason does the Saguenay give for returning to us with such a tale?"

"He says," she replied, "that we only, of all Iroquois or white men he has ever encountered, have treated him like a man and not as an unclean beast.

"He says that my white brother has told him he is a man, and that if this is true he will act as real men act.

"He says he desires to be painted upon the breast with a little red foot, and wishes to go into battle with us. And," she added naïvely, "to an Oneida this seems very strange that a Saguenay can be a real man!"

"Paint him," said I, smiling at the Saguenay.

But no Oneida would touch him. So, while he stripped to the clout and began to oil himself from the flask of gun-oil I offered, I got from him, through Thiohero, all he had noticed of the

ambuscade prepared for us, and into which he himself had run headlong in his flight from the stones and insults of the Mohawks at the Big Eddy.

While he was thus oiling himself, Luysnes shaved his head with his hunting blade, leaving a lock to be braided. Then, very quickly, I took blue paint from Thiohero and made on the fellow's chest a hawk. And, with red paint, under this I made a little red foot, then painted his fierce, thin features as the girl directed, moving a dainty finger hither and thither but never touching the Saguenay.

To me she said disdainfully, in English: "My brother John, this is a wild wolf you take hunting with you, and not a hound. The Saguenays are real wolves and not to be tamed by white men or Iroquois. And like a lone wolf he will run away in battle. You shall see, brother John."

"I hope not, little sister."

"You shall see," she repeated, her pretty lip curling as Luysnes began to braid the man's scalp-lock. "You think him a warrior, now, because he is oiled and wears war paint and lock. But I tell you he is only a wild Montagnais hunter. Warriors are not made with a word."

"Sometimes men are," said I pleasantly.

The girl came closer to me, looked up into my face with unfeigned curiosity.

"What manner of white man are you, John?" she asked. "For you speak like a preacher, yet you wear no skirt and cross, as do the priests of the Praying Indians."

"Little sister," said I, taking both her hands, "I am only a young man going into battle for the first time; and I have yet to fire my first shot in anger. If my white and red brothers—and if you, little sister—do full duty this day, then we shall be happy, living or dead. For only those who do their best can look the Holder of Heaven in the face."

She gave me a strange glance; our hands parted. I gave the Canada-sparrow call in the minor key—as often the bird whistles—and, at the signal, all my scouts came creeping in.

"We cross West River here," said I, "and go by the left bank in the same order of march, crossing the shoulder of the mountain by the Big Eddy, then fording the river once more, so as to take their ambuscade from the north and in the rear."

They seemed to understand. The Montagnis, in his new paint, came around behind me like some savage dog that trusts only his owner. And I saw my Oneidas eyeing him as though of two

minds whether to ignore him or sink a hatchet into his narrow skull.

"Who first sights a Mohawk," said I, "shall not fire or try to take a scalp to satisfy his own vanity and his desire for glory. No. He shall return to me and report what he sees. For it is my business to order the conduct of this battle. . . . March!"

We had forded West River, crept over the mountain's shoulder, recrossed the river roaring between its rounded and giant bowlders, and now were creeping southward toward the Big Eddy.

Already I saw ahead of me the brook that dashes into that great crystal-green pool, where, in happier days, I have angled for those huge trout that always lurk there.

And now I caught a glimpse of the pool itself, spreading out between forested shores. But the place was still as death; not a living thing nor any sign of one was to be seen there—not a trace of a fire, nor of any camp filth, nor a canoe, nor even a broken fern.

Moment after moment, I studied the place, shore and slope and hollow.

Tahioni, flat on his belly in the Great Trail, lay listening and looking up the slope, where our Saguenay had warned us Death lay waiting.

The Water-snake slowly shook his head and cast a glance of fierce suspicion at the Montagnais, who lay beside me, grasping his sorry trade-rifle, his slitted gaze of a snake fixed on the forest depths ahead.

Suddenly, Nick caught my arm in a nervous grasp, and "My God!" says he, "what is that in the tree—in the great hemlock yonder?"

And now we began to see their sharpshooters as we crawled forward, standing upright on limbs amid the foliage of great evergreens, to scan the trail ahead and the forest aisles below—these Mohawk panthers that would slay from above.

Under them, hidden close to the ground, lay their comrades on either side of the little ravine, through which the trail ran. We could not see them, but we never doubted they were there.

Four of their tree-cat scouts were visible: I made the sign; our rifles crashed out. And, thump! slap! thud! crash! down came their dead a-sprawling and bouncing on the dead leaves. And up rose their astounded comrades from every hollow, bush and windfall, only to drop flat at our rifles' crack, and no knowing if we had hit any among them.

A veil of smoke lay low among the ferns in front of us. There was a terrible silence in the forest, then screech on screech rent the air, as the panther slogan rang out from our unseen foes; and, like a dreadful echo, my Oneidas hurled their war cry back at them; and we all sprang to our feet and moved swiftly forward, crouching low in our own rifle smoke.

There came a shot, and a cloud spread among the boughs of a tall hemlock; but the fellow left his tree and slid down on t'other side, like a squirrel, and my wild Saguenay was after him in a flash.

I saw the Oneidas looking on as though stupefied; saw the Saguenay, shoulder deep in witch-hopple, seize something, heard the mad struggle, and ran forward with Tahioni, only to hear the yelping scalp-cry of the Montagnais, and see him in the tangle of witch-hopple, both knees on his victim's shoulders, ripping off the scalp, his arms and body spattered with blood.

The stupefaction of the Oneidas lasted but a second, then their battle yell burst out in jealous fury indescribable.

I saw Tahioni chasing a strange Indian through a little hollow full of ferns; saw Godfrey Shew raise his rifle and kill the fugitive as coolly as though he were a running buck.

Nick, his shoulder against a beech tree, stood firing with great deliberation at something I could not see.

The three Frenchmen, de Golyer, Luysnes, and Johnny, had gone around, as though deer driving, and were converging upon a little wooded knoll, from which a hard-wood hogback ran east.

Over this distant ridge, like shadows, I could see somebody's light feet running, checkered against the sunshine beyond, and I fired, judging a man's height, if stooping. And saw something dark fall and roll down into a gully full o' last year's damp and rotting leaves.

Re-charging my rifle, I strove to realize that I had slain, but could not, so fierce the flame in me was burning at the thought of the children's scalps these Iroquois had taken.

"Is he down, Johnny Silver?" I bawled.

"Fairly paunched!" shouted Luysnes. "Tell your Oneidas they can take his hair, for I shan't touch it."

But Johnny Silver, in no wise averse, did that office very cheerfully.

"Nom de Dieu!" he panted, tugging at the oiled lock and wrenching free the scalp; "I have one veree fine jou-jou, sacré garce! I take two; mek for me one fine wallet!"

Down by the river the rifles were cracking fast and a smoke

mist filled the woods. Ranging widely eastward we had turned their left flank—now their right—and were forcing them to a choice between the Sacandaga trail southward or the bee-line back to Canada by the left bank of West River.

How many there were of them I never have truly learned; but that scarcely matters to the bravest Indian, when ambuscaded and taken so completely by surprise from the rear.

No Indians can stand that, and but few white men are able to rally under such circumstances.

The Screech-owl, locked in a death struggle with a young Mohawk, broke his arm, stabbed him, and took his scalp before I could run to his aid.

And there on the ground lay four other scalps, two of white children, with the Little Red Foot painted on all.

I looked down at the dead murderer. He was a handsome boy, not twenty, and wore a white mask of war paint and two bars of scarlet on his chin, I thought—then realized that they were two thick streaks of running blood.

"May his clan bewail him!" shouted the burly Screech-owl. "Let the Mohawk women mourn their dead who died this day at West River! The Oneida mock them! Koué!" And his terrific scalp-yell pierced the racket of the rifles.

I heard a gruffling sound and thick breathing from behind a pine, where the Water-snake was scalping one of the tree-cat scouts—grunting and panting as he tugged at the tough and shaven skin, which he had grasped in his teeth, plying his knife at the same time because the circular incision had not been continuous.

Suddenly I felt sick, and leaned against a tree, fighting nausea and a great dizziness. And was aware of an arm around my shoulder.

Whereupon I straightened up and saw the little maid of Askalege beside me, looking at me very strangely.

At the same instant I heard a great roaring and cursing and a crash among the river-side willows, and was horrified to see Nick down on his back a-clawing and tearing and cuffing a Mohawk warrior, who was clinging to him and striving to use his hatchet.

We made but a dozen leaps of it, Thiohero and I, and were in a wasp-nest of Mohawks ere we knew it.

I heard Nick roar again with pain and fury, but had my hands too full to succor him, for a wild beast painted yellow was choking me and wrestling me off my feet, and little Thiohero was fighting like a demon with her knife, on the water's edge.

The naked warrior I clutched was so vilely oiled that my fingers slipped over him as though it were an eel I plucked at, and his foul and stinking breath in my face was like a full fed bear's.

Then, as he strangled me, out of darkening eyes I saw his arm lifted—glimpsed the hatchet's sparkle—saw an arm seize his, saw a broad knife pass into his belly as though it had been butter—pass thrice, slowly, ripping upward so that he stood there, already gralloched, yet still breathing horribly and no bowels in him. . . . His falling hatchet clinked among the stones. Then he sank like a stricken bull, bellowed, and died.

And, as he fell, I heard my Saguenay gabbling, "Brother! brother!" in my ears, and felt his hand timidly seeking mine.

Breath came back, and eyesight, too, in time to see Nick and his Mohawk enemy on their feet again, and the Indian strike my comrade with clubbed rifle, turn, and dart into the willows.

My God, what a crack! And down went Nick, like a felled pine in the thicket.

But now in my ears rang a distressful crying, like a gentle wild thing wounded to the death; and I saw two Mohawks had got the little maid of Askalege between them, and were drowning her in the Big Eddy.

I ran out into the water, but Tahioni, her brother, came in a flying leap from the bank above me, and all four went down under water as I reached them.

They came up blinded, staggering, one by one, and I got Thiohero by the hair, where she lay in shallow water, and dragged her ashore behind me.

Then I saw her brother clear his eyes of water and swing his hatchet like swift lightning, and heard the smashing skull stroke.

The other Mohawk dived like an otter between us, and I strove to spear him with my knife, but only slashed him and saw the long, thin string of blood follow where he swam under water.

My powder-pan was wet and flashed when I tried to shoot him, where I stood shoulder deep in the Big Eddy.

Then came a thrashing, splashing roar like a deer herd crossing a marshy creek, and, below us, I saw a dozen Mohawks leap into the water and thrash their way over. And not a rifle among us that was dry enough to take a toll of our enemies crossing the West River plain in sight!

Lord, what a day! And not fought as I had pictured battles. No! For it was blind combat, and neither managed as planned nor in any kind of order or discipline. Nor did we ever, as I have said, discover how many enemies were opposed to us. And

I am certain they believed that a full regiment had struck their rear; otherwise, I think it had proven a very bloody business for me and my people. Because the Mohawks are brave warriors, and only the volley at their backs and the stupefying down-crash of their tree-scouts demoralized them and left them capable only of fighting like cornered wild things in a maddened effort to get away.

Lord, Lord! What a battle! For all were filthy with blood, and there were brains and hair and guts sticking to knives and hatchets, and bodies and limbs all smeared. Good God! Was this war? And the green flies already whirling around us in the sunshine, and settling on the faces of the dead!—

The little maid of Askalege, leaning on her brother's shoulder, was coughing up water she had swallowed.

Nick, with a bloody sconce, but no worse damage, sat upon a rock and washed out his clotted hair.

"Hell!" quoth he, when he beheld me. "Here be I with a broken poll, and yonder goes the Indian who gave it me."

"Sit still, idiot!" said I, and set the ranger's whistle to my lips.

White and red, my men came running from their ferocious hunting. Not a man was missing, which was another lesson in war to me, for I thought always that death dealt hard with both sides, and I could not understand how so many guns could be fired with no corpse to mourn among us.

We had taken ten scalps; and, as only Johnny Silver among my white people fancied such trophies, my Oneidas skinned the noddles of our quarry, and, like all Indians, counted any scalp a glory, no matter whose knife or bullet dropped the game.

We all bore scratches, and some among us were stiff, so that the scratch might, perhaps, be called a wound. A bullet had barked de Golyer, another had burned Tahioni; Silver proudly wore a knife wound; the Screech-owl had been beaten and somewhat badly bitten. As for Nick, his head was cracked, and the little maid of Askalege still spewed water.

As for me, my throat was so swollen and bruised I could scarce speak or swallow.

However, there was work still to be done, so I took Godfrey and Luysnes, the Screech-owl, and the Water-snake; motioned Yellow Leaf, the Montagnais to follow, and set off across West River, determined to drive our enemies so deep into the wilderness that they would never forget the Big Eddy as long as they survived on earth.

CHAPTER XVI

A TROUBLED MIND

THAT was a wild brant chase indeed! And although there were good trackers among us, the fleeing Canienga took to the mountain streams and travelled so, wading northward mile after mile, which very perfectly covered their tracks, and finally left us travelling in circles near Silver Lake.

I now think St. Sacrament must have mirrored their canoes—God and they alone know the truth!—for I never heard of any other Mohawks, or any Englishmen at all, or Frenchmen for that matter, who ever have heard of this Mohawk war party coming south to meet and rescue Sir John.* Nor do our own records, except generally, mention our measures taken to stop the Sacandaga trail, or speak of the fight at the Big Eddy as a separate and distinct combat.

It may be that this fight at the Big Eddy remained unnoticed because we sustained no losses. Also, we were losing our people all along the wilderness, from the ashes of Falmouth to the Ohio. I do not know. But my chiefest concern, then and later, was that the survivors among these Caniengas got clean away, which misfortune troubled my mind, although my Oneidas had a Dutch dozen of their scalps, all hooped and curing, when we limped into the Drowned Lands from our wild brant chase above.

Now, my orders being to stop the Sacandaga Trail, there seemed no better way than to cut this same trail with a ditch and plant in it a chevaux-de-frise; and then so dispose my men that even a scout might remain in touch by signal and be prepared to fall back behind this barrier if Sir John crept upon our settlements by stealth.

Fish House could provision us, or the Point, if necessary; and any scout of ours in the Drowned Lands ought to see smoke by day or fire by night from Maxon's nose to Mayfield.

* Years later, Thayendenegea made a reference to this attempt, but the inference was that he himself led the war party, which is not true, because Brant was then in England.

My scout of four and I passed in wearily between the rough, low redoubts at Fish House, after sunset, and gave an account to Peter Wayland, the captain commanding the post, that the northward war-trail was now clean as far as Silver Lake, and that I proposed to block it and watch it above and below.

Twilight was deepening when we came to John Howell's deserted log-house on the Vlaie, and heard the owls very mournful in the tamarack forests eastward.

A few rods farther on the hard ridge and one of my men challenged smartly. In thick darkness he led us over hard ground along the vast wastes of bushes and reeds, to where a new ditch had been dug down to the Vlaie Water.

Thence he guided us through our chevaux-de-frise; and I saw my own people lying in the shadowy gleam of a watch-fire; and an Oneida slowly moving around the smouldering coals, chanting the refrain of his first scalp-dance:

SCALP SONG

"Chiefs in your white plumes!
When your Tall Cloud glooms,
And we Oneidas wonder
To hear your thunder—
And the moon pales,
And the Seven Dancers wear veils,
Is it your rain that wails?
Is it the noise of hail?
Is it the rush of frightened deer
That we Oneidas hear?"

And the others chanted in sombre answer:

"It is the weeping of the Mohawk Nation,
Mourning amid their desolation,
For the scalpless head
Of each young warrior dead.

A Voice from the Dark

"It is the cry of their women, who bewail
Their warriors dead,
Not the east wind we hear!
It is the noise of their women, who rail
At those who fled,
Not whistling hail we hear!
It is the rush of feet that are afraid,
Not the swift flight of deer!"

Another Voice

"Let them flee,—the East Gate Keepers—
Whose dead lie still as sleepers!
Let the Canienga fly before our wrath,
Scatter like chaff,
When we Oneidas laugh!
Koué!"

Tahioni

"Holder of Heaven,
And every Chief named in the Great Rite!
Dancers Seven!
And the Eight Thunders plumed in white!
At dawn I was a young man,
Who had seen no enemy die.
But my foe was a deer who ran,
And I struck; and let him lie."

The Screech-owl Dances

"The Mohawk Nation has fled,
But my war-axe sticks in its head!
Koué!"

The Water-snake Dances

"Let the Wild Goose keep to the skies!
Where the Brant alights, he dies!
Koué!"

Thiohero, their Prophetess

"The Lodge poles crack in the East!
The Long House falls.
Who calls the Condolence Feast?
Who calls?"

She Dances Very Slowly

"Who calls the Roll of the Dead?
Who opens the door?
The Fire in the West burns red,
But our fire-place burns no more!
Thendara—Thendara no more!"

It was plain to me that my Indians meant to make a night of it—even those who, dog weary, had but now returned with me from the futile brant chase and sat eating their samp.

The French trappers squatted in a row, smoking their pipes and looking on with that odd sympathy for any savage rite, which, I think, partly explains French success among all Indians.

Firelight glimmered red on their weather-ravaged faces, on their gaudy fringes and moccasins.

Near them, lolling in the warm young grass, sprawled Nick and Godfrey. I sat down by them, my back against a log. My Saguenay crept to my side. I gave him to eat, and, for my own supper, ate slowly a handful of parched corn, watching my young Oneidas around the fire, where they moved in their slow dance, singing and boasting of their first scalps taken.

The little maid of Askalege came and seated herself close to me on my right.

"I am weary," she murmured, letting her head fall back against the log.

"Tell me," said I in English, "is there any reason why this Saguenay, who has proved himself a real man and no wolf, should not sing his own scalp-song among our Oneidas?"

"None," she repeated. "The Yellow Leaf is a real man."

"Tell him so."

The girl turned her head and spoke to the Saguenay in his own gutturals. I also watched to see what effect such praise might have.

For a few minutes he sat motionless and without any expression upon his narrow visage, yet I knew he must be bursting with pride.

"Tahioni!" I called out. "Here, also, is a real man who has taken scalps in battle. Shall not our *brother,* Yellow Leaf, of the Montagnais, sing his first scalp-song at an Oneida fire?"

There was a pause, then every Oneida hatchet flashed high in the fire-light.

"Koué!" they shouted. "We give fire right to our brother of the Montagnais, who is a real man and no wolf!"

At that the Saguenay hunter, who, in a single day, had became a warrior, leaped lightly to his feet, and began to trot like a timber wolf around the fire, running hither and thither as an eager, wild thing runs when searching.

Then he shouted something I did not understand; but Thiohero interpreted, watching him: "He looks in vain for the tracks of a poor Saguenay hunter, which once he was, but he can find only

the footprints of a proud Saguenay warrior, which now he has become!"

Now, in dumb show, this fierce and homeless rover enacted all that had passed,—how he had encountered the Canienga, how they had mocked and stoned him, how we had captured him, proved kind to him, released him; how he had returned to warn us of ambuscade.

He drew his war-axe and shouted his snarling battle-cry; and all the Oneidas became excited and answered like panthers on a dark mountain.

Then Yellow Leaf began to dance an erratic, weird dance—and, somehow, I thought of dead leaves eddying in a raw wind as he whirled around the fire, singing his first scalp-song:

"Who are the Yanyengi,* that a
Saguenay should fear them?
They are but Mowaks,† and
Real men jeer them!
I am a warrior; I wear the lock!
I am brother to the People of the Rock! ‡
Red is my hatchet; my knife is red;
Woe to the Mengwe, who wail their dead!
I wear the Little Red Foot and the Hawk;
Death to the Maquas who stone and mock!
Koué! Haï!"

An Oneida

"Hah!
Hawasahsai!
Hah!"

The Saguenay

"Who are the Yanyengi, that
Real men should obey them?
We People of the Dawn were
Born to slay them!
I eat twigs in winter when there is no game;
What does he eat, the Maqua? What means his name?
To each of us a Little Red Foot! To each his clan!
Let the Mengwe flee when they scent a Man!
Koué! Haï!"

* The Huron for Canienga.
† A Mohican term of insult, but generally used to express contempt for the Canienga.
‡ Oneida.

And

"Hah! Hawasahsai!"

chanted the Oneidas, trotting to and fro in the uncertain red light, while we white men sat, chin on fist, a-watching them; and the little sorceress of Askalege beat her palms softly together, timing the rhythm for lack of a drum.

An hour passed: my Indians still danced and sang and bragged of deeds done and deeds to be accomplished; my young sorceress sat asleep, her head fallen back against me, her lips just parted. At her feet a toad, attracted by the insects which came into the fire-ring, jumped heavily from time to time and snapped them up.

An intense silence brooded over that vast wilderness called the Drowned Lands; not a bittern croaked, not a wild duck stirred among the reeds.

Very far away in the mist of the tamaracks I heard owls faintly halooing, and it is a melancholy sound which ever renders me uneasy.

I was weary to the bones, yet did not desire sleep. A vague presentiment, like a mist on some young peak, seemed to possess my senses, making me feel as lonely as a mountain after the sun has set.

I had never before suffered from solitude, unless missing the beloved dead means that.

I missed them now,—parents who seemed ages long absent,—or was it I, their only son, who tarried here below too long, and beyond a reasonable time?

I was lonely. I looked at the scalps, all curing on their hoops, hanging in a row near the fire. I glanced at Nick. He lay on his blanket, sleeping. . . . The head of the little Athabasca Sorceress lay heavy on my shoulder; she made no sound of breathing in her quiet sleep. Both her hands were doubled into childish fists, thumbs inside.

Johnny Silver smoked and smoked, his keen, tireless eyes on the Scalp Dancers; Luysnes, also, blinked at them in the ruddy glare, his powerful hands clasping his knees; de Golyer was on guard.

I caught Godfrey's eye, motioned him to relieve Joe, then dropped my head once more in sombre meditation, lonely, restless, weary, and unsatisfied. . . .

And now, again,—as it had been for perhaps a longer period of time than I entirely comprehended,—I seemed to see darkly,

and mirrored against darkness, the face of the Scottish girl. . . . And her yellow hair and dark eyes; . . . and that little warning glimmer from which dawned that faint smile of hers. . . .

That I was lonely for lack of her I never dreamed then. I was content to see her face grow vaguely; sweetly take shape from the darkness under my absent gaze;—content to evoke the silent phantom out of the stuff that ghosts are made of—those frail phantoms which haunt the secret recesses of men's minds.

I was asleep when Nick touched me. Thiohero still slept against my shoulder; the Yellow Leaf and the Oneidas still danced and vaunted their prowess, and they had set a post in the soft earth near the shore, and had painted it red; and now all their hatchets were sticking in it, while they trotted tirelessly in their scalping dance, and carved the flame-shot darkness with naked knives.

Wearily I rose, took my rifle, re-primed it, and stumbled away to take my turn on guard, relieving Nick, who, in turn, had replaced Godfrey, whom I had sent after Joe de Golyer.

They had dug our ditch so well that the Vlaie water filled it, making, with the pointed staves, an excellent abattis against any who came by stealth along the Sacandaga trail.

Behind this I walked my post, watching the eastern stars, which seemed paler, yet still remained clearly twinkling. And no birds had yet awakened, though the owls had become quiet in the tamaracks, and neither insect nor frog now chanted their endless runes of night.

Shouldering my rifle, I walked to and fro, listening, scanning the darkness ahead. . . . And, presently, not lonely; for a slim phantom kept silent pace with me as I walked my post—so near, at times, that my nostrils seemed sweet with the scent of apple bloom. . . . And I felt her breath against my cheek and heard her low whisper.

Which presently became louder among the reeds—a little breeze which stirs before dawn and makes a thin ripple around each slender stem.

Tahioni came to relieve me, grave, not seeming fatigued, and, in his eyes, the shining fire of triumph still unquenched.

I went back to the fire and lay down on my blanket, where now all were asleep save my Saguenay.

When he saw me he came and squatted at my feet.

"Sleep you, also, brother," said I. "Day dawns and the sunset is far away."

But the last time I looked before I slept I saw him still squatting at my feet like a fierce, lean dog, and staring straight before him.

And I remember that the fresh, joyous chorus of waking birds was like the loud singing of spirit-children. And to the sweet sound of that blessed choir I surrendered mind and body, and so was borne on wings of song into the halls of slumber-land.

The sun was high when our sentinel hailed a detail from Fish House, bringing us a sheep, three sacks of corn, and a keg of fresh milk.

I had bathed me in the Vlaie Water, had eaten soupaan, turned over my command to Nick, and now was ready to report in person to the Commandant at Summer House Point.

My Saguenay had slain a gorgeous wood-duck with his arrows; and now, brave in fresh paint and brilliant plumage, he sat awaiting me in the patched canoe which had belonged, no doubt, to John Howell.

I went down among the pinxter bushes and tall reeds to the shore; and so we paddled away on the calm, deep current which makes a hundred snake-like curls and bends to every mile, so that the mile itself becomes doubled,—nay, tripled!—ere one attains his destination.

It was strange how I was not yet rid of that vague sense of impending trouble, nor could account for the foreboding in any manner, being full of health and now rested.

My mind, occupied by my report, which I was now reading where I had written it in my *carnet,* nevertheless seemed crowded with other thoughts,—how we would seem each to the other when we met again,—Penelope Grant and I. And if she would seem to take a pleasure in my return . . . perhaps say as much . . . smile, perhaps. . . . And we might walk a little on the new grass under the apple bloom. . . .

A troubled mind! And knew not the why and wherefore of its own restlessness and apprehension. For the sky was softly blue, and the water, too; and a gentle wind aided our paddles, which pierced the stream so silently that scarce a diamond-drop fell from the sunlit blades.

I could see the Summer House, and a striped jack flying in the sun. The green and white lodge seemed very near across the marshes, yet it was some little time before I first smelled

the smoke of camp fires, and then saw it rising above the bushes.

Presently a Continental on guard hailed our canoe. We landed. A corporal came, then a sergeant,—one Caspar Quant, whom I knew,—and so we were passed on, my Indian and I, until the gate-guard at the Point halted us and an officer came from the roadside,—one Captain Van Pelt, whom I knew in Albany.

Saluted, and the officer's salute rendered, he became curious to see the fresh scalps flapping at my Saguenay's girdle, and the new war-paint and the oil smelling rank in the sweet air.

But I told him nothing, asking only for the Commandant, who, he gave account, was a certain Major Westfall, lodging at the Summer House, and lately transferred from the Massachusetts Line, along with other Yankee officers—why?—God and Massachusetts knew, perhaps.

So I passed the gate and walked toward the lodge. Sir John's blooded cattle were grazing ahead, and I saw Flora at the well, and Colas busy among beds of garden flowers, spading and weeding under the south porch.

And I saw something else that halted me. For, seated upon a low limb of an apple tree, her two little feet hanging down, and garbed in pink-flowered chintz and snowy fichu, I beheld Penelope Grant, a-knitting.

And by all the pagan gods!—there in a ring around her strolled and lolled a dozen Continental officers in buff and blue and gold!

There was no reason why, but the scene chilled me.

One o' these dandies had her ball of wool, and was a-winding of it as he sat cross-legged on the turf, a silly, happy look on his beardless face.

Another was busy writing on a large sheet of paper,—verses, no doubt!—for he seemed vastly pleased with his progress, and I saw her look at him shyly under her dark lashes, and could have slain him for the smirk he rendered. Also, it did not please me that her petticoat was short and revealed her ankles and slim feet in silver-buckled shoon.

I was near; I could hear their voices, their light laughter; and, rarely, her voice in reply to some pointed gallantry or jest.

None had perceived me advancing among the trees, nor now noticed me where I was halted there in the checkered sunshine.

But, as I stirred and moved forward, the girl turned her head, caught a glimpse of me and my painted Indian, stared in silence, then slid from her perch and stood up on the grass, her needles motionless.

All the young popinjays got to their feet, and all stared as I offered them the salute of rank; but all rendered it politely.

"Lieutenant of Rangers Drogue to report to Major Westfall," said I bluntly, in reply to a Continental Captain's inquiry.

"Yonder, sir, on the porch with Lady Johnson," said he.

I bared my head, then, and walked to Penelope. She curtsied: I bent to her hand.

"Are you well, my lord?" she asked in a colourless voice, which chilled me again for its seeming lack of warmth.

"And you, Penelope?"

"I am well, I thank you."

"I am happy to learn so."

That was all. I bowed again. She curtsied. I replaced my mole-skin cap, saluted the popinjays, and marched forward. My Indian stalked at my heels.

God knew why, but mine had become a trouble mind that sunny morning.

CHAPTER XVII

DEEPER TROUBLE

I HAD been welcomed like a brother by Polly Johnson. Claudia, too, made a little fête of my return, unscathed from my first war-trail. And after I had completed my report to the Continental Major, who proved complacent to the verge of flattery, I was free to spend the day at the Summer House—or, rather, I was at liberty to remain as long a time as it took a well-mounted express to ride to Johnstown with my report and return with further orders from Colonel Dayton for me and my small command.

A Continental battalion still garrisoned the Point; their officers as I had been forced to notice in the orchard, were received decently by Lady Johnson.

And, at that crisis in her career, I think I admired Polly Johnson as entirely as I ever had admired any woman I ever knew.

For she was still only a child, and had been petted and spoiled always by flattery and attentions: and she was not very well—her delicate condition having now become touchingly apparent. She was all alone,—save for Claudia,—among the soldiery of a new and hostile nation; she was a fugitive from her own manor; and she must have been constantly a prey to the most poignant anxieties concerning her husband, whom she loved,—whatever were his fishy sentiments regarding her!—and who, she knew, was now somewhere in the Northern and trackless wilderness and fighting nature herself for his very life.

Her handsome and beloved brother, also, was roaming the woods, somewhere, with Walter Butler and McDonald and a bloody horde of Iroquois in their paint,—and, worse still, a horde of painted white men, brutes in man's guise and Mohawk war-paint and feathers, who already were known by the terrifying name of Blue-eyed Indians.

Yet this young girl, having resolved to face conditions with courage and composure, after her first bitter and natural outburst, never whimpered, never faltered.

Enemy officers, if gentlemen, she received with quiet, dignified civility, and no mention of politics or war was suffered to embarrass anybody at her table.

All, I noticed, paid her a deference both protective and tender, which, in gentlemen, is instinctive when a woman is in so delicate a condition and in straits so melancholy.

Claudia, however, I soon perceived, had been nothing tamed, and even less daunted by the errant arrows of adversity; for her bright eyes were ever on duty, and had plainly made a havoc of the Continental Major's heart, to judge by his sheep's eyes and clumsy assiduities.

For when he left the veranda and went away noisily in his big spurs, she whispered me that he had already offered himself thrice, and that she meant to make it a round half-dozen ere he received his final quietus.

"A widower," quoth she, "and bald; and with seven hungry children in Boston! Oh, Lord. Am I come to that? Only that it passes time to play with men, I'd not trouble to glance askance at your Yankee gentlemen, Jack Drogue."

"Some among them have not yet glanced askance at you," remarked Lady Johnson, placid above her sewing.

"Do you mean those suckling babes in the orchard yonder? Oh, la! When the Major leaves, I shall choose the likeliest among 'em to amuse me. Not that I would cross Penelope," she added gaily, "or flout her. No. But these boys perplex her. They are too ardent, and she too kind."

"What!" I exclaimed, feeling my face turn hot.

"Why, it is true enough," remarked Lady Johnson. "Yonder child has no experience, and is too tender at heart to resent a gallantry over-bold. Which is why I keep my eye upon these youngsters that they make not a fool of a girl who is easily confused by flattery, and who remains silent when dusk and the fleeting moment offer opportunities to impudent young men, which they seldom fail to embrace."

"And seldom fail to embrace the lady, also," added Claudia, laughing. "*You* were different, Jack."

"I saw that ensign, Dudley, kiss her behind the lilacs," added Lady Johnson, "and the girl seemed dumb, and never even upbraided the little beast. Had she complained to me I should have made him certain observations, but could not while she herself remained mute. Because I do not choose to have anybody think I go about eavesdropping."

"Penelope Grant appears to find their company agreeable,"

said I, in a voice not like my own, but a dry and sullen voice such as I never before heard issue out o' my own mouth.

"Penelope likes men," observed Lady Johnson, sewing steadily upon her baby's garments of fine linen.

"Penelope is not too averse to a stolen kiss, I fear," said Claudia, smiling. "Lord! Nor is any pretty woman, if only she admit the truth! No! However, there is a certain shock in a kiss which silences maiden inexperience and sadly confuses the unaccustomed. Wait till the girl gains confidence to box some impertinent's ear!"

I knew not why, yet never, I think, had any news sounded in my ears so distastefully as the news I now had of this girl, I remembered Nick's comment,—"Like flies around a sap-pan." And it added nothing to my pleasure or content of mind to turn and gaze upon that disquieting scene in the orchard yonder.

For here, it seemed, was another Claudia in the making,—still unlearned in woman's wiles; not yet equipped for those subtle coquetries and polished cruelties which destroy, yet naturally and innocently an enchantress of men. And some day to be conscious of her power, and certain to employ it!

Flora came, wearing a blue and orange bandanna, and the great gold hoops in her ears glittering in the sun.

Each day, now, it appeared, Lady Johnson retired for an hour's repose whilst Claudia read to her; and that hour had arrived.

"You dine with us, of course," said Lady Johnson, going, and looking at me earnestly. Then there was a sudden flash of tears; but none fell.

"My dear, dear Jack," she murmured, as I laid my lips against both her hands. . . . And so she went into the house, Claudia lingering, having shamelessly pressed my hand, and a devil laughing at me out of her two eyes.

"Is there news of Sir John to comfort us?" she whispered, making a caress of her voice as she knew so well how to do.

"And if I have any, I may not tell you, Claudia," said I.

"Oh, la! Aid and comfort to the enemy? Is it that, Jack? And if you but wink me news that Sir John is safe?"

"I may not even wink," said I, smiling forlornly.

"Aye? So! That's it, is it! A wink from you at me, and pouf!—a courtmartial! Bang! A squad of execution! Is that it, Jack?"

"I should deserve it."

"Lord! If men really got their deserts, procreation would cease, and the world, depopulated, revert to the forest beasts. Well, then—so Sir John is got away?"

"I did not say so."

"You wear upon your honest countenance all the news you contain, dear Jack," said she gaily. "It was always so; any woman may read you like a printed page—if she trouble to do it. . . . And so! Sir John is safe at last! Well, thank God for that. . . . You may kiss my cheek if you ask me."

She drew too near me, but I had no mind for more trouble than now possessed me, so let her pretty hand lie lightly on my arm, and endured the melting danger of her gaze.

She said, while the smile died on her lips, "I jest with you, Jack. But you *are* dear to me."

"Dear as any trophy," said I. "No woman ever willingly lets any victim entirely escape."

"You do not guess what you could do with me—if you would," she said.

"No. But I guess what you could do to me, again, if you had an opportunity."

"Jack!" she sighed, looking up at me.

But the gentle protest alarmed me. And she was too near me; and the fresh scent of her hair and skin were troubling me.

And, more than that, there persisted a dull soreness in my breast,—something that had hurt me unperceived—an unease which was not pain, yet, at times, seemed to start a faint, sick throbbing like a wound.

Perhaps I assumed that it came from some old memory of her unkindness; I do not remember now, only that I seemed to have no mind to stir up dying embers. And so, looked at her without any belief in my gaze.

There was a silence, then a bright flush stained her face, and she laughed, but as though unnerved, and drew her hand from my arm.

"If you think all the peril between us twain is yours alone, Jack Drogue," she said, "you are a very dolt. And I think you *are* one!"

And turned her back and walked swiftly into the house.

I took my rifle from where it stood against a veranda post, settled my war-belt, with its sheathed knife and hatchet, re-adjusted powder-horn and bullet pouch, and, picking up my cap of silver moleskin, went out into the orchard.

Behind me padded my Saguenay in his new paint, his hooped

scalps swinging from his cincture, and the old trade-rifle covered carefully by his blanket, except the battered muzzle which stuck out.

I walked leisurely; my heart was unsteady, my mind confused, my features, unless perhaps expressionless, were very likely grim.

I went straight to the group around the twisted apple-tree, where Penelope sat knitting, and politely made myself a part of that same group, giving courteous notice by my attitude and presence, that I, also, had a right to be there as well as they.

All were monstrous civil; some offered snuff; some a pipe and pouch; and a friendly captain man engaged me in conversation—gossip of Johnstown and the Valley—so that, without any awkwardness, the gay and general chatter around the girl suffered but a moment's pause.

The young officer who had writ verses, now read them aloud amid lively approbation and some sly jesting:

IN PRAISE

"Flavilla's hair,
Beyond compare,
Like sunshine brightens all the earth!
Old Sol, beware!
She cheats you, there,
And robs your rays of all their worth!

"Impotent blaze!
I shall not praise
Your brazen ways,
Nor dare compare
Your flaming gaze
To those sweet rays
Which play around Flavilla's hair.

"For lo, behold!
No sunshine bold
Can hope to gild or make more fair
The living gold,
Where, fold on fold,
In glory shines Flavilla's hair!"

There was a merry tumult of praise for the poet, and some rallied him, but he seemed complacent enough, and Penelope looked shyly at him over lagging needles,—a smile her acknowledgment and thanks.

"Sir," says a cornet of horse, in helmet and jack-boots—though I perceived none of his company about, and wondered where he came from,—"will you consent to entertain our merry Council with some account of the scout which, from your appearance, sir, I guess you have but recently accomplished."

To this stilted and somewhat pompous speech I inclined my head with civility, but replied that I did not yet feel at liberty to discuss any journey I may have accomplished until my commanding officer gave me permission. Which mild rebuke turned young Jack-boots red, and raised a titter.

An officer said: "The dry blood on your hunting shirt, sir, and the somewhat amazing appearance of your tame Indian, who squats yonder, devouring the back of your head with his eyes, must plead excuse for our natural curiosity. Also, we have not yet smelled powder, and it is plain that you have had your nostrils full."

I laughed, feeling no mirth, however, but sensible of my dull pain and my restlessness.

"Sir," said I, "if I have smelled gun-powder, I shall know that same perfume again; and if I have not yet sniffed it, nevertheless I shall know it when I come to scent it. So, gentlemen, I can not see that you are any worse off in experience than I."

A subaltern, smiling, ventured to ask me what kind of Indian was that who esquired me.

"Of Algonquin stock," said I, "but speaks an odd lingo, partly Huron-Iroquois, partly the Loup tongue, I think. He is a Saguenay."

"One of those fierce wanderers of the mountains," nodded an older officer. "I thought they were not to be tamed."

"I owned a tame tree-cat once," remarked another officer.

My friend, Jack-boots, now pulls out a bull's-eye watch with two fobs, and tells the time with a sort of sulky satisfaction. For many of the company arose, and made their several and gallant adieux to Penelope, who suffered their salute on one little hand, while she held yarn and needles in t'other.

But when half the plague of suitors and gallants had taken themselves off to their several duties, there remained still too many to suit young Jack-boots. Too many to suit me, either; and scarce knowing what I did or why, I moved forward to the tree where she was seated on a low swinging limb.

"Penelope," said I, "it is long since I have seen you. And if these gentlemen will understand and pardon the desire of an

old friend to speak privately with you, and if you, also, are so inclined, give me a little time with you alone before I leave."

"Yes," she said, "I am so inclined—if it seem agreeable to all."

I am sure it was not, but they conducted civilly enough, save young Jack-boots, who got redder than ever and spoke not a word with his bow, but clanked away pouting.

And there were also two militia officers, wrapped in great watch cloaks over their Canajoharie regimentals, and who took their leave in silence. One wore boots, the other black spatter-dashes that came above the knee in French fashion, and were fastened under it, too, with leather straps.

Their faces were averted when they passed me, yet something about them both seemed vaguely familiar to me. No wonder, either, for I should know, by sight at least, many officers in our Tryon militia.

Whether they were careless, or unmannerly by reason of taking offense at what I had done, I could not guess.

I looked after them, puzzled, almost sure I had seen them both before; but where I could not recollect, nor what their names might be.

"Shall we stroll, Penelope?" I said.

"If it please you, sir."

Sir William had cut the alders all around the point, and a pretty lawn of English grass spread down to the water north and west, and pleasant shade trees grew there.

While she rolled her knitting and placed it in her silken reticule, I, glancing around, noticed that all the apple bloom had fallen, and the tiny green fruit-buds dotted every twig.

Then, as she was ready, and stood prettily awaiting me in her pink chintz gown, and her kerchief and buckled shoon, I gave her my hand and we walked slowly across the grass and down to the water.

Here was a great silvery iron-wood tree a-growing and spreading pleasant shade; and here we sat us down.

But now that I had got this maid Penelope away from the pest of suitors, it came suddenly to me that my pretenses were false, and I really had nothing to say to her which might not be discussed in company with others.

This knowledge presently embarrassed me to the point of feeling my face grow hot. But when I ventured to glance at her she smiled.

"Have you been in battle?" she asked.

"Yes."

After a silence: "I am most happy that you returned in safety."

"Did you ever—ever think of me?" I asked.

"Why, yes," she replied in surprise.

"I thought," said I, "that being occupied—and so greatly sought after by so many gallants—that you might easily have forgotten me."

She laughed and plucked a grass-blade.

"I did not forget you," she said.

"That is amazing," said I, "—a maid so run after and so courted."

She plucked another blade of grass, and so sat, pulling at the tender verdure, her head bent so that I could not see what her eyes were thinking, but her lips seemed graver.

"Well," said I, "is there news of Mr. Fonda?"

"None, sir."

"Tell me," said I, smiling, "why, when I speak, do you answer ever with a 'sir'?"

At that she looked up: "Are you not Lord Stormont, Mr. Drogue?" she asked innocently.

"Why, no! That is, nobody believes it any more than did the Lords in their House so many years ago. Is that why you sometimes say 'my lord,' and sometimes call me 'sir?'"

"But you still are the Laird of Northesk."

"Lord!" said I, laughing. "Is it that Scottish title bothers you? Pay it no attention and call me John Drogue—or John. . . . Or Jack, if you will. . . . Will you do so?"

"If it—pleases you."

She was still busy with the grass, and I watched her, waiting to see her dark eyes lift again—and see that little tremor of her lips which presaged the dawning smile.

It dawned, presently; and all the unrest left my breast—all that heavy dullness which seemed like the flitting shadow of a pain.

"Tell me," said I, "are you happy?"

"I am contented. I love my Mistress Swift. I love and pity Lady Johnson. . . . Yes, I am happy."

"I know they both love you," said I. "So you should be happy here. . . . And admired as you are by all men. . . ."

Again she laughed in her enchanting little way, and bent her bright head. And, presently:

"John Drogue?"

"I hear you, Penelope."

"Do you wish warm woolen stockings for your men?"

"Why—yes."

"I sent to Caydutta Lodge for the garments. They are in the house. You shall choose for yourself and your men before the Continentals take their share."

I was touched, and thanked her. And now, it being near the noon hour, we walked together to the house.

The partition which Sir John had made for a gun-room, and which now served to enclose Penelope's chamber, was all hung with stout woolen stockings of her own knitting; and others lay on her trundle-bed. So I admired and handled and praised these sober fruits of her diligence and foresight, and we corded up some dozen pair for my white people; and I stuffed them into my soldier's leather sack.

Then I took her hands and said my thanks; and she looked at me and answered, "You are welcome, John Drogue."

I do not know what possessed me to put my arm around her. She flushed deeply. I kissed her; and it went to my head.

The girl was dumb and scarlet, not resisting, nor defending her lips; but there came a clatter of china dishes, and I released her as Flora and Colas appeared from below, with dinner smoking, and clattering platters.

And presently Lady Johnson's door opened, and she stepped out in her silk levete, followed by Claudia.

"I invited no one else," said Lady Johnson, "—if that suits you, Jack."

I protested that it suited me, and that I desired to spend my few hours from duty with them alone.

As we were seated, I ventured a side glance at Penelope and perceived that she seemed nothing ruffled, though her colour was still high. For she gave me that faint, enchanting smile that now began to send a thrill through me, and she answered without confusion any remarks addressed to her.

Remembering my Indian outside, I told Flora, and Colas took food to him on the veranda.

And so we spent a very happy hour there—three old friends together once more, and a young girl stranger whom we loved already. And I did not know in what degree I loved her, but that I did love her now seemed somewhat clear to my confused senses and excited mind,—though to love, I knew, was one thing, and to be *in* love was still another. Or so it seemed to me.

My animation was presently noticed by Claudia; and she rested her eyes on me. For I talked much and laughed more,

and challenged her gay conceits with a wit which seemed to me not wholly contemptible.

"One might think you had been drinking of good news," quoth she; "so pray you share the draught, Jack, for we have none of our own to quench our thirst."

"Unless none be good news, as they say," said Lady Johnson, wistfully.

"News!" said I. "Nenni! But the sun shines, Claudia, and life is young, and 'tis a pretty world we live in after all."

"If you admire a marsh," says she, "there's a world o' mud and rushes to admire out yonder."

"Or if you admire a cabinful o' lonely ladies," added Lady Johnson, "you may gaze your fill upon us."

"I should never be done or have my fill of beauty if I sat here a thousand years, Polly," said I.

"A thousand years and a dead fish outshines our beauty," smiled Lady Johnson. "If you truly admire our beauty, Jack, best prove it now."

"To which of us the Golden Apple?" inquired Claudia, offering one of the winter russets which had been picked at the Point.

"Ho!" said I, "you think to perplex and frighten me? *Non, pas!* Polly Johnson shall not have it, because, if she ever makes me wise, wisdom is its own reward and needs no other. And you shall not have it, Claudia!"

"Why not?"

"Mere beauty cannot claim it."

"Why not? Venus received the apple cast by Eris."

"But only because Venus promised Love! Do you promise me the reward of the shepherd?"

"Myself?" she asked impudently.

"Venus," said Lady Johnson, "made that personal exception, and so must you, Claudia. The goddess promised beauty; but not herself."

"Then," said I, "Claudia has nothing to offer me. And so I give the apple to Penelope!"

She refused it, shyly.

"Industry is the winner," said I. "Thrift triumphs. I already have her gift. I have a dozen pair of woolen stockings for my men, knitted by this fair Penelope of today. And, as she awaits no wandering lord, though many suitors press her, then she should have at least this golden apple of Eris to reward her. And so she shall."

And I offered it again.

"Take it, my dear," said Claudia, laughing, "for this young man s given you a reason. Pallas offered military glory; you offer litary stockings! What chance have Hera and poor Aphrodite such a contest?"

We all were laughing while the cloth was cleared, and Flora ought us a great dish of wild strawberries.

These we sopped in our wine and tasted at our ease, there by e open windows, where a soft wind blew the curtains and the r spreading azure waters sparkled in the sun.

How far away seemed death!

I looked out upon the mountains, now a pale cobalt tint, and eir peaks all denting the sky like blue waves on Lake Erie ainst the horizon.

Low over the Vlaie Water flapped a giant heron, which alighted t far away and stood like a sentry, motionless at his post.

A fresh, wild breath of blossoms grew upon the breeze—the chanting scent of pinxters. From the mainland, high on a gar-maple's spire, came the sweet calling of a meadow-lark.

Truly, war seemed far away; and death farther still in this ar Northland of ours. And I fell a-thinking there that if ings could only see this land on such a day, and smell the pinx-s, and hear the sweetened whistle of our lark, there would be war here, no slavery, no strife where liberty and freedom were e very essence of the land and sky.

My Lady Johnson wished to rest; and there was a romance out France awaiting her in gilt binding in her chamber.

She went, when the board was cleared, linking her arm in laudia's.

Penelope took up her knitting with a faint smile at me.

"Will you tell me a story to amuse me, sir?" she said in her y way.

"You shall tell me one," said I.

"I? What story?"

"Some story you have lived."

"I told you all."

"No," said I, "not any story concerning this very pest of suit-s which plague you—or, if not you, then me!—as the suitors the first Penelope plagued Telemachus."

Now she was laughing, and, at one moment, hid her face in r yarn, still laughing.

"Does this plague you, John Drogue?" she asked, still all rosy her mirth.

"Well," said I, "they all seem popinjays to me in their blue and gold and buff. But it was once redcoats, too, at Caughnawaga, or so I hear."

"Oh. Did you hear that?"

"I did. They sat like flies around a sap-pan."

"Deary me!" she exclaimed, all dimples, "who hath gossiped of me at Cayadutta Lodge?"

"Penelope?"

"I am attentive, sir."

"I suppose all maids enjoy admiration."

"I suppose so."

"Hum! And do you?"

"La, sir! I am a maid, also."

"And enjoy it?"

"Yes, sir. . . . Do not you?"

"What?"

"Do not you enjoy admiration? Is admiration displeasing to young men?"

"Well—no," I admitted. "Only it is well to be armed with experience—hum-hum!—and discretion when one encounters the flattery of admiration."

"Yes, sir. . . . Are you so armed, Mr. Drogue?"

At a loss to answer, her question being unexpected—as were many of her questions—and answers also—I finally admitted that flattery was a subtle foe and that perhaps experience had not wholly armed me against that persuasive enemy.

"Nor me," said she, with serene candour. "And I fear that I lack as much in knowledge and experience as I do in years, Mr. Drogue. For I think no evil, nor perhaps even recognize it when I meet it, deeming the world kind, and all folk unwilling to do me a wrong."

"I—kissed you."

"Was that a wrong you did me?"

"Have not others kissed you?" said I, turning red and feeling mean.

But she laughed outright, telling me that it concerned herself and not me what she chose to let her lips endure. And I saw she was a very child, all unaccustomed, yet shyly charmed by flatteries, and already vaguely aware that men found her attractive, and that she also was not disinclined toward men, nor averse to their admiration.

"How many write you verses?" I asked uneasily.

"Gentlemen are prone to verses. Is it unbecoming of me to encourage them to verse?"

"Why, no. . . ."

"Did you think the verses fine you heard in the orchard?"

"Oh, yes," said I, carelessly, "but smacking strong of Major André's verses to his several Sacharissas."

"Oh. I thought them fine."

"And all men think you fine, I fear—from that soldier who pricked your name on his powder-horn at Mayfield fort to Bully Cock Gallopaway of the Border Horse at Caughnawaga, and our own little Jack-boots in the orchard yonder."

"Only Jack Drogue dissents," she murmured, bending over her knitting.

At that I caught her white hand and kissed it; and she blushed and sat smiling in absent fashion at the water, while I retained it.

"You use me sans façon," she murmured at last. "Do you use other women so?"

Now, I had used some few maids as wilfully, but none worse, yet had no mind to admit it, nor yet to lie.

"You ask me questions," said I, "but answer none o' mine."

At that her gay smile broke again. "What a very boy," quoth she, "to be Laird o' Northesk! For it is cat's-cradle talk between us two, and give and take to no advancement. Will you tell me, my lord, if it gives you pleasure to touch my lips?"

"Yes," said I. "Does it please you, too?"

"I wonder," says she, and was laughing again out of half-shy eyes at me.

But, ere I could speak again, comes an express a-galloping; and we saw him dismount at the mainland gate and come swiftly across the orchard.

"My orders," said I, and went to the edge of the veranda.

The letter he handed me was from Colonel Dayton. It commended me, enjoined secrecy, approved my Oneidas and my Caguenay, but warned me to remain discreetly silent concerning these red auxiliaries, because General Schuyler did not approve our employing savages.

Further, he explained, several full companies of Rangers had now been raised and were properly officered and distributed for employment. Therefore, though I was to retain my commission, he preferred that I command my present force as a scout, and not attempt to recruit a Ranger company.

"For," said he, "we have great need of such a scout under an

officer who, like yourself, has been Brent-Meester in these forests."

However, the letter went on to say, I was ordered to remain on the Sacandaga trail with my scout of ten until relieved, and in the meanwhile a waggon with pay, provisions, and suitable clothing for my men, and additional presents for my Indians, was already on its way.

I read the letter very carefully, then took my tinder-box and struck fire with flint and steel, blowing the moss to a glow. To this I touched the edge of my letter, and breathed on the coal till the paper flamed, crinkled, fell in black flakes, and was destroyed.

For a few moments I stood there, considering, then dismissed the express; but still stood a-thinking.

And it seemed to me that there was indecision in my commander's letter, where positive and virile authority should have breathed action from every line.

I know, now, that Colonel Dayton proved to be a most excellent officer of Engineers, later in our great war for liberty. But I think now, and thought then, that he lacked that energy and genius which meets with vigour such a situation as was ours in Tryon County. . . . God knows to what sublime heights Willet soared in the instant agony of black days to come! . . . And comparisons are odious, they say. . . . So Colonel Dayton occupied Johnstown, garrisoned Summer House Point and Fish House, and was greatly embarrassed what to do with his prisoner, Lady Johnson. . . . A fine, brave, loyal officer—who made us very good forts.

But, oh, for the dead of Tryon!—and the Valley in ashes from end to end; and the whole sky afire!—Lord! Lord!—what sights I have lived to see, and seeing, lived to tell!

My memories outstrip my quill.

So, when I came out of my revery, I turned and walked back slowly to Penelope, who lifted her eyes in silence, clasping her fair hands over idle needles.

"I go back tonight," said I.

"To the forest?"

"To the trail by the Drowned Lands."

"Will you come soon again?"

"Do you wish it?"

"Why, yes, John Drogue," she said; and I saw the smile glimmer ere it dawned.

And now comes my Lady Johnson and her Abagail for a dish of tea on the veranda, where a rustic table was soon spread by Colas, very fine in his scarlet waistcoat and a new scratch-wig.

Now, to tea, comes sauntering our precious plague of suitors, one by one, and two by two, from the camp on the mainland. And all around they sit them down—with ceremony, it's true, but their manners found no favour with me either. And I thought of Ulysses, and of the bow that none save he could bend.

Well, there was ceremony, as I say, and some subdued gaiety, not too marked, in deference to Lady Johnson's political condition.

There was tea, which our officers and I forbore to taste, making a civil jest of refusal. But there was an eggnog for us, and iced punch, and a syllabub and cakes.

Toward sundown a young officer brought his fiddle from camp and played prettily enough.

Others sang in acceptable harmony a catch or two, and a romantic piece for concerted voices, which I secretly thought silly, yet it pleased Lady Johnson.

Then, at Claudia's request, Penelope sang a French song made in olden days. And I thought it a little sad, but very sweet to hear there in the gathering dusk.

Other officers came up in the growing darkness, paid their respects, tasted the punch. Candles glimmered in the Summer House. Shadowy forms arrived and departed or wandered over the grassy slope along the water.

I missed Claudia. Later, I saw Penelope rise and give her hand to a man who came stalking up in a watch cloak; and presently they strolled away over the lawn, with her arm resting on his.

Major Westfall and Lady Johnson were conversing gravely on the north porch. Others, dimly visible, chatted around me or moved with sudden clank of scabbard and spur.

Penelope did not come back. At first I waited calmly enough, then with increasing impatience.

Where the devil had she gone with her Captain Spatter-dash? Claudia I presently discovered with men a-plenty around her; but Penelope was not visible. This troubled me.

So I went down to the orchard, carelessly sauntering, and not as though in search of anybody. And so encountered Penelope.

She and her young man in the watch-cloak passed me, moving

slowly under the trees. He wore black spatter-dashes. And, as we saluted, it came to me that this was one of the officers from the Canajoharie Regiment; but in the starlight I knew him no better than I had by day.

"Strange," thought I, "that young Spatter-dashes seems so familiar to my eyes, yet I can not think who he may be."

Then, looking after him, I saw his comrade walking toward me from the well, and with him was Colas, with a lantern, which shined dimly on both their faces.

And, suddenly: "Why, sir!" I blurted out in astonishment, "are you not Captain Hare?"

"No, sir," said he, "my name is Sims, and I am captain in the Canajoharie militia." And he bowed civilly and walked on, Colas following with the lantern, leaving me there perplexed and still standing with lifted cap in hand.

I put it on, pondered for a space, striving to rack my memory, for that man's features monstrously resembled Lieutenant Hare's, as I saw him at supper that last night at Johnson Hall, when he came there with Hiokatoo and Stevie Watts, and that Captain Moucher, whom I knew a little and trusted less, for all his mealy flatteries.

Well, then, I had been mistaken. It was merely a slight resemblance, if it were even that. I had not thought of Hare since that evening, and when I saw this man by lantern light, as I had seen him by candles, why, I thought he seemed like Hare. . . . That was all. . . . That certainly was all there could be to it.

Near to the lilacs, where candle light fell from the south window of the little lodge, I stumbled once again upon Penelope. And she was in Spatter-dash's arms!

For a moment I stood frozen. Then a cold rage possessed me, and God knows what a fool I had played, but suddenly a far whistle sounded from the orchard; and young Spatter-dash kisses her and starts a-running through the trees.

He had not noticed me, nor discovered my presence at all; but Penelope, in his arms, had espied me over his shoulder; and I thought she seemed not only flushed but frightened, whether by the fellow's rough ardour or my sudden apparition I could not guess.

Still cold with a rage for which there was no sensible warrant, I walked slowly to where she was standing and fumbling with her lace apron, which the callow fool had torn.

"I came to say good-bye," said I in even tones.

She extended her hand; I laid grim and icy lips to it; released it.

There was a silence. Then: "I did not wish him to kiss me," said she in an odd voice, yet steady enough.

"Your lips are your own."

"Yes. . . . They were yours, too, for an instant, Mr. Drogue."

"And they were Spatter-dash's, too," said I, almost stifled by my jealous rage. "Whose else they may have been I know not, and do not ask you. Good night."

She said nothing, and presently picked at her torn apron.

"Good night," I repeated.

"Good night, sir."

And so I left her, choked by I knew not what new and fierce emotions—for I desired to seek out Spatter-dash, Jack-boots, and the whole cursed crew of suitors, and presently break their assorted necks. For now I was aware that I hated these popinjays who came philandering here, as deeply as I hated to hear of the redcoat gallants at Caughnawaga.

Still a-quiver with passion, I managed, nevertheless, to make my compliments and adieux to Lady Johnson and to Claudia—felt their warm and generous clasp, answered gaily I know not what, saluted all, took a lantern that Flora fetched, and went away across the grass.

A shadow detached itself from darkness, and now my Saguenay was padding at my heels once more.

As we two came to the mainland, young Spatter-dash suddenly crossed the road in front of my lantern. Good God! Was I in my right mind! Was it Stephen Watts on whose white, boyish face my lantern glimmered for an instant? How could it be, when it meant death to catch him here? . . . Besides, he was in Canada with Walter Butler. What possessed me, that in young Spatter-dash I saw resemblance to Stevie Watts, and in another respectable militia officer a countenance resembling Lieutenant Hare's?

Sure my mind was obsessed tonight by faces seen that last unhappy evening at the Hall; and so I seemed to see a likeness to those men in every face I met. . . . Something had sure upset me. . . . Something, too, had suddenly awakened in me new and deep emotions, unsuspected, unfamiliar, and unwelcome.

And for the first time in my life I knew that I hated men because a woman favoured them.

We had passed through the Continental camp, my Indian and I, and were now going down among the bushes to the Vlaie Water, where lay our canoe, when, of a sudden, a man leaped from the reeds and started to run.

Instantly my Indian was on his shoulders like a tree-cat, and down went both on the soft mud, my Saguenay atop.

I cocked my rifle and poked the muzzle into the prostrate stranger's ribs, resting it so with one hand while I shined my lantern on his upturned face.

He wore a captain's uniform in the Canajoharie Regiment; and, as he stared up at me, his throat still clutched by the Saguenay, I found I was gazing upon the blotched features of Captain Moucher!

"Take your hands from his neck-cloth, cut your thrums, and make a cord to tie him," said I, in the Oneida dialect. "He will not move," I added.

It took the Indian a little while to accomplish this. I held my rifle muzzle to Moucher's ribs. Until his arms were tied fast behind him, he had not spoken to me nor I to him; but now, as he rose to his knees from the mud and then staggered upright, I said to him:

"This is like to be a tragic business for you, Captain Moucher."

He winced but made no reply.

"I am sorry to see you here," I added.

"Do you mean to murder me?" he asked hoarsely.

"I mean to question you," said I. "Be good enough to step into that canoe."

The Indian and I held the frail craft. Moucher stepped into it, stumbling in the darkness and trembling all over.

"Sit down on the bottom, midway between bow and stern!"

He took the place as I directed.

"Take the bow paddle," said I to Yellow Leaf. "Also loosen your knife."

And when he was ready, I shoved off, straddled the stern, and, kneeling, took the broad paddle.

"Captain Moucher," said I, "if you think to overturn the canoe, in hope of escape, my Indian will kill you in the water."

The canoe slid out into darkness under the high stars.

CHAPTER XVIII

FIRELIGHT

NOW, no sooner did I reach my camp with my prisoner than my people came crowding around us from their watch-fire, which burned dull because they had made a smudge of it, black flies being lively after dark.

I drew Nick aside and told him all.

"You shall take Johnny Silver," said I, "and set off instantly for Summer House and the Continental camp. You shall deliver a letter to Major Westfall, and then you shall search with your lanterns every face you encounter; for I am beginning to believe that I truly saw Stephen Watts and Lieutenant Hare in the orchard at Summer House Point this night. And if I did, then they are a pair o' damned spies, and should be taken; and suffer as such!"

"My God," says he, "Lady Johnson's brother!"

"And my one-time friend. Is it not horrible, Nick? But any hesitation makes me a traitor to my own people."

I sat down in the dull firelight, a block of wood for a seat, fished out my carnet, wrote a line to Major Westfall, and handed it to Nick.

Silver came with a lantern and both rifles.

"Use the canoe," said I, "and have a care that you reply clearly and promptly when challenged, for yonder Continentals are prone to shoot."

They went off with their rifles and the lantern, and I waited until I heard the dip of paddles in the dark.

"Throw a dry log on the fire, Godfrey," said I. And to Joe de Golyer: "Bring that prisoner here."

Joe fetched him, and he stood before me, arms trussed up and head hanging. Tahioni approached.

"Untie him," said I.

Whilst they were fumbling with the knotted rope of thrums, I said to Tahioni:

"Luysnes is on guard, I take it?"

"My French brother watches."

"That is well. Now, tell my Oneida brothers that here we have taken a very dangerous man; and that if he makes any move to escape from where he stands beside that fire, they shall not attempt to take him *alive!*"

The young warrior turned calmly and translated. I saw my Oneidas loosen their knives and hatchets. The Saguenay quietly strung his short, heavy bow, and, laying an arrow across the string, notched it.

"Thiohero!" I called.

"I listen, my elder brother," said the little maid of Askalege.

"You shall take a trade-rifle, move out one hundred paces to the west, and halt all who come. And fire on any who refuse to halt."

"I listen," she said coolly.

"You shall call to us if you need us."

"I continue to listen."

"And if there comes a wagon, then you shall take the horses by the head and lead them this way until the fire shines on their heads. Go, little sister."

She took a trade-rifle from the stack, primed it freshly, and crossed the circle on light, swift feet.

When she had gone into the darkness, I bade de Golyer kick the fire. He did so and it blazed ruddy, painting in sanguine colour the sombre, unhealthy visage of my prisoner.

"Search him," said I briefly.

Joe and my Oneida rummaged him to the buff. It was in his boots they discovered, at last, a sheaf of papers.

I could not read what was writ, for the writing was in strange signs and figures; so presently I gave over trying and looked up at my prisoner, who now had dressed again.

"You are Captain Moucher?"

He denied it hoarsely; but I, having now no vestige of doubt concerning this miserable man's identity, ignored his answer.

"What is this paper which was taken from your boot?"

He seemed to find no word of explanation, but breathed harder and watched my eyes.

"Is it writ in a military cipher?"

"I do not know."

"How came these papers in your boot?"

He stammered out that somebody who had cleansed his boots must have dropped them in, and that, in pulling on his boots that morning, he had neither seen nor felt the papers.

"Where did you dress this morning?"

"At the Johnson Arms in Johnstown."

"You wear the uniform of an officer in the Canajoharie Regiment. Are you attached to that regiment?"

He said he was; then contradicted himself, saying he had been obliged to borrow the clothing from an officer because, while bathing in the Mohawk at Caughnawaga, his own clothing had been swept into the water and engulfed.

Over this lie he was slow in speech, and stammered much, licking his dry lips, and his reddish, furtive eyes travelling about him as though his stealthy mind were elsewhere.

"Do you recollect that we supped in company at Johnson Hall —you and I—and not so long ago?" I demanded.

He had no remembrance.

"And Lieutenant Hare and Captain Watts were of the company?"

He denied acquaintance with these gentlemen.

"Or Hiakatoo?"

Had never heard of him.

I bade Joe lay more dry wood on the fire and kick it well, for the sphagnum moss still dulled it. And, when it flared redly, I rose and walked close to the prisoner.

"What are you doing here?"

He had merely come out of curiosity to see the camp at Summer House.

"In disguise?"

He had no other clothing, and meant no harm. If we would let him go he would engage to return to Albany and never again to wear any clothing to which he was not entitled.

"Oh. Who was your mate there in the orchard, who also wore the Canajoharie regimentals?" I demanded.

An acquaintance made en passant, nothing more. He did not even know his name.

"I'll tell you his name," said I. "That man was Lieutenant Hare. And you are Captain Moucher. You are spies in our camp. We've taken you; we ought to take him before midnight.

"The paper I have of you is writ in British military cipher.

"Now, before I send you to Colonel Dayton, with my report of this examination, what have you to confess that I might add to my report, in extenuation?"

He made no answer. Presently a fit of ague seized him, so that he could scarce stand. Then he reeled sideways and, by accident, set foot in the live coals. And instantly went clean crazed with fright.

As the Oneida caught him by the shoulder, to steady him, he shrieked and cowered, grasping Joe's arm in his terror.

"They mean to murder me!" he yelled. "Keep your savages away, I tell you!"—struggling between Tahioni and Joe—"I'll say what you wish, if they won't burn me!——"

"Be silent," I said. "We mean no bodily harm to you. Compose yourself, Captain Moucher. Do you take me for a monster to threaten you with torture?"

But the awful fear of fire was in this whimpering wretch, and I was ashamed to have my Oneidas see a white man so stricken with cowardly terrors.

His honour—what there was of it—he sold in stammering phrases to buy mercy of us; and I listened in disgust and astonishment to his confession, which came in a pell-mell of tumbling words, so that I was put to it to write down what he babbled.

He had gone on his knees, held back from my feet by the Oneida; and his poltroonery so sickened me that I could scarce see what I wrote down in my *carnet*.

Every word was a betrayal of comrades; every whine a plea for his own blotched skin.

To save his neck—if treachery might save it—he sold his King, his cause, his comrades, and his own manhood.

And so I learned of him that Stevie Watts, disguised, had been that night at Summer House with Lieutenant Hare; that they had brought news to Lady Johnson of Sir John's safe arrival in Canada; that they had met and talked to Claudia Swift; had counted our men and made a very accurate report, which was writ in the military cipher which we discovered, and a copy of which Captain Watts also carried upon his proper person.

I learned that Walter Butler, now a captain of Royalist Rangers, also had come into the Valley in disguise, for the purpose of spying and of raising the Tory settlers against us.

I learned that Brant and Guy Johnson had been in England, but were on their way hither.

I learned that our army in Canada, decimated by battle, by small-pox, by fever, was giving ground and slowly retreating on Crown Point; and that Arnold now commanded them.

I learned that we were to be invaded from the west, the north, and the south by three armies, and thousands of savages; that Albany must burn, and Tryon flame from Schenectady to Saint Sacrement. . . . And I wrote all down.

"Is there more?" I asked, looking at him with utter loathing.

"Howell's house," he muttered, "the log house of John Howell —tonight——"

"The cabin on the hard ridge yonder?"

"Yes. . . . A plot to massacre this post. . . . They meet there."

"Who?"

"King's people. . . . John Howell, Dries Bowman, the Cadys, the Helmers, Girty, Dawling, Gene Grinnis, Balty Weed——"

"Tonight!"

"Yes."

"Where are they now?"

"Hid in the tamaracks—in the bush—God knows where!——"

"When do they rendezvous?"

"Toward midnight."

"At John Howell's cabin?"

He nodded, muttering.

I got up, took him by the arm and jerked him to his feet.

"Read this!" I said, and thrust the paper of cipher writing under his nose.

But he could not, saying that Steve Watts had writ it, and that he was to carry it express to Oswego.

Now, whilst I stood there, striving to think out what was best to do and how most prudently to conduct in the instant necessity confronting me, there came Thiohero's sweet, clear whistle of a Canada sparrow, warning us to look sharp.

Then I heard the snort of a horse and the rattle and bump of a wagon.

"Tie the prisoner," said I to Godfrey; and turned to see the little maid of Askalege, her rifle shouldered, leading in two horses, behind which rumbled the wagon carrying our pay, food, arms, and clothing sent from Johnstown.

Two armed Continental soldiers sat atop; one, a corporal, driving, t'other on guard.

I spoke to them; called my Indians to unload the wagon, and bade Thiohero sling our kettle and make soupaan for us all.

The Continentals were nothing loth to eat with us. Tahioni had killed some wood-duck and three partridges; and these, with some dozen wild pigeons from the Stacking Ridge, furnished our meat.

I heaped a wooden platter and Godfrey squatted by Captain Moucher to feed him; but the prisoner refused food and sat with head hanging and the shivers shaking him with coward's ague.

When the meal was ended, I took the Continentals aside, gave

the Corporal my report to Colonel Dayton, and charged them to deliver my prisoner at Johnstown jail. This they promised to do; and, as all was ready, horses fed, and a long, slow jog to Johnstown, the Corporal climbed to his seat and took the reins, and the other soldier aided my prisoner to mount.

"Will you speak for me at the court martial?" pleaded Moucher, in hoarse and dreadful tones. "Remember, sir, as God sees me, my confession was voluntary, and I swear by my mother's memory that I now see the error and the wickedness of my ways! Say that I said this—in Christ's name——"

The Corporal touched his cocked hat, swung his powerful horses. I am sure they were of Sir William's stock and came from the Hall.

"Mr. Drogue!" wailed the doomed wretch, "let God curse me if I meant any harm——"

I think the soldier beside him must have placed his hand over the poor wretch's mouth, for I heard nothing more except the rattle of wheels and the corporal-driver a-whistling "The Little Red Foot."

In my absence that day my men had erected an open-face hut for our stores.

Here we set lanterns, and here divided the clothing, including the stockings given me by Penelope—which I distributed with a heavy heart.

There was laid aside new buckskin clothing and fresh underwear for Luysnes, for Nick, and for Johnny Silver.

Then I paid the men, and gave a cash bonus to every Indian, and also a new rifle each,—not the trade-gun, but good weapons carrying an ounce ball.

To each, also, a new hatchet, new knife, blanket, leggins, tobacco, paints, razor, mirror, ammunition, and a flask of sweet-smelling oil.

I think I never have seen any Iroquois so overjoyed as were mine. And as for my Saguenay, he instantly squatted by the fire, fixed his mirror on a crotched stick, and fell to adorning himself by the red glow of the coals.

But I had scant leisure for watching them, where they moved about laughing and gossiping excitedly, comparing rifles, trying locks and pans, sorting out finery, or smearing themselves with gaudy symbols.

For, not a hundred rods east of us, across the ridge, stood that log hut of Howell's; and the owl-haunted tamaracks stretched

away behind it in a misty wilderness. And in that swampy forest, at this very moment, were hidden desperate men who designed our deaths—men I knew—neighbors at Fonda's Bush, like the Cadys, Helmers, and Dries Bowman!—men who lately served in my militia company, like Balty Weed and Gene Grinnis.

Now, as I paced the fire circle, listening and waiting for Nick and Johnny Silver, I could scarce credit what the wretch, Moucher, had told me, so horrid bloody did their enterprise appear to me.

That they should strive to kill us when facing us in proper battle, that I could comprehend. But to plan in the darkness! —to come by stealth in their farmer's clothes to surprise us in our sleep!—faugh!

"My God," says I to Godfrey, who paced beside me, "why have they not at least embodied to do us such a filthy business? And if they were only a company with some officer to make them respectable—militia, minute men, rangers, anything!"

"They be bloody-minded folk," said he grimly. "No coureur-du-bois is harder, craftier, or more heartless than John Howell; no forest runner more merciless than Charlie Cady. These be rough and bloody men, John. And I think we are like to have a rude fight of it before sun-up."

I thought so too, but did not admit as much. I had ten men. They mustered ten—if Moucher's accounts were true. And I did not doubt it, under the circumstances of his pusillanimous confession.

The River Reed came to me to show me her necklace of coloured glass. And I drew her aside, told her as much as I cared to, and bade her prepare her Oneidas for a midnight battle.

At that moment I heard the Canada sparrow. Thiohero answered, sweet and clear. A few seconds later Nick and Silver came in, carrying the canoe paddles.

"They've gone," said Nick, with an oath. "Two mounted men and a led horse rode toward Johnstown two hours since. They wore Canajoharie regimentals. Major Westfall sent a dozen riders after 'em; but men who came so boldly to spy us out are like to get away as boldly, too."

He plucked my arm and I stepped apart with him.

"Westfall's in his dotage; Dayton is too slow. Why don't they send up Willett or Herkimer?"

"I don't know," said I, troubled.

"Well," says Nick, "it's clear that Stevie Watts was there and has spoken with Lady Johnson. But what more is to be done?

She's our prisoner. I wish to God they'd sent her to Albany or New York, where she could contrive no mischief. And that other lady, too. Lord! but Major Westfall is in a pother! And I wager Colonel Dayton will be in another, and at his wit's ends."

The business distressed me beyond measure, and I remained silent.

"By the way," he added, "your yellow-haired inamorata sends you a billet-doux. Here it is."

I took the bit of folded paper, stepped aside and read it by the firelight:

"Sir:

"I venture to entertain a hope that some day it may please you to converse again with one whose offense—if any—remains a mystery to her still. P. G."

I read it again, then crumpled it and dropped it on the coals. I had seen Steve Watts kiss her. That was enough.

"There's a devil's nest of Tories gathering in Howell's house tonight to cut our throats," said I coldly. "Should we take them with ten men, or call in the Continentals?"

"Who be they?" asked Nick, astounded.

"The old pack—Cadys, Helmers, Bowman, Weed, Grinnis. They are ten rifles."

He got very red.

"This is a domestic business," said I. "Shall we wash our bloody linen for the world to see what filth chokes Fonda's Bush?"

"No," said he, slowly, with that faint flare in his eyes I had seen at times, "let us clean our own house o' vermin, and make no brag of what is only our proper shame."

CHAPTER XIX

OUT OF THE NORTH

IT lacked still an hour to midnight, which time I had set for our advance upon John Howell's house, and my Oneidas had not yet done painting, when Johnny Silver, who was on guard, whistled from his post, and I ran thither with Nick.

A man in leather was coming in through the *chevaux-de-frise,* and Johnny dropped a tamarack log across the ditch for him, over which he ran like a tree-martin, and so climbed up into the flare of Nick's lantern.

The man in forest runner's dress was Dave Ellerson, known to us all as a good neighbor and a staunch Whig; but we scarce recognized him in his stringy buckskins and coon-skin cap, with the ringed tail a-bobbing.

On his hunting shirt there was a singular device of letters sewed there in white cloth, which composed the stirring phrase, "Liberty or Death." And we knew immediately that he had become a soldier in the 11th Virginia Regiment, which is called Morgan's Rifles.

He seemed to have travelled far, though light, for he carried only rifle and knife, ammunition, and a small sack which flapped flat and empty; but his manner was lively and his merry gaze clear and untroubled as we grasped his powerful hands.

"Why, Dave!" said I, "how come you here, out o' the North?"

"I travel express from Arnold to Schuyler," said he. "Have you a gill of rum, John?"

Johnny Silver had not drunk his gill, and poured it into Dave's pannikin.

Down it went, and he smacked his lips. Then we took him back to the fire, where the Oneidas were still a-painting, and made him eat and drink and dry him by the flames.

"Is there a horse to be had at Summer House?" he demanded, his mouth full of parched corn.

"Surely," said I. And asked him news of the North, if he were at liberty to give us any account.

"The news I can not give you is what I shall not," said he, laughing. "But there's plenty besides, and damned bad."

"Bad?"

"Monstrous bad, John. For on my forest-running south from Chambly, I saw Sir John and his crew as they gained the Canadas! They seemed near dead, too, but they were full three hundred, and I but one, so I did not tarry to mark 'em with a stealthy bullet, but pulled foot for Saint Sacrement."

He grinned, bit a morsel from a cold pigeon, and sat chewing it reflectively and watching the Indians at their painting.

"You know what is passing in Canada?" he demanded abruptly.

"Nothing definite," said I.

"Listen, then. We had taken Chambly, Montreal, and St. John's. Arnold lay before Quebec. Sullivan commanded us. Six weeks ago he sent Hazen's regiment to Arnold. Then the Canadians and Indians struck us at the Cedars, and we lost five hundred men before we were out of it."

"What was the reason for such disaster?" I demanded, turning hot with wrath.

"Cowardice and smallpox," said he carelessly. "They were new troops sent up to reinforce us, and their general, Thomas, died o' the pox.

"And atop of that comes news of British transports in the St. Lawrence, and of British regulars and Hessians.

"So Sullivan sends the Pennsylvania Line to strike 'em. St. Clair marches, Wayne marches, Irving follows with his regiment. Lord, how they were peppered, the Pennsylvania Line! And Thompson was taken, and Colonel Irving, and they wounded Anthony Wayne; and the Line ran!"

"Ran!"

"By God, yes. And our poor little Northern Army is on the run today, with thirteen thousand British on their heels.

"They drove us out o' Chambly. They took the Cedars. Montreal fell. St. John's followed. Quebec is freed. We're clean kicked out o' Canada, and marching up Lake Champlain, our rear in touch with the redcoats.

"If we stand and face about at Crown Point, we shall do more than I hope for.

"Thomas is dead, Thompson and Irving taken, Arnold and Wayne wounded, the army a skeleton, what with losses by death, wounds, disease, and in prisoners.

"Had not Arnold broke into the Montreal shops and taken food and woolen clothing, I think we had been naked now."

"Good heavens!" said I, burning with mortification, "I had not heard of such a rout!"

"Oh, it was no rout, John," said he carelessly. "Sullivan marched us out of that hell-hole in good order—whatever John Adams chooses to say about our army."

"What does John Adams say?"

"Why, he says we are disgraced, defeated, dispirited, discontented, undisciplined, diseased, eaten up with vermin."

"My God!" exclaimed Nick.

"It's true enough," said Dave, coolly. "And when John Adams also adds that we have no clothing, no beds, no blankets, no medicines, and only salt pork and flour to eat and little o' these, why, he's right, too. Why not admit truth? Does it help to conceal it? Nenni, lads! It is best always to face it and endeavour to turn into a falsehood tomorrow what is disgracefully true today.

"So when I tell you that in three months our Northern Army has lost five thousand men by smallpox, camp fever, bullets, and privation—that out of five thousand who remain, two thousand are sick, why, it's the plain and damnable truth.

"But any soldier who loses sleep or appetite over such cursed news should be run through with a bayonet, for he's a rabbit and no man!"

After a silence: "Who commands them now?" I asked.

"Gates is to take them over at Crown Point, I hear."

This news chilled me, for Schuyler should have commanded. But the damned Yankees, plotting their petty New England plots to discredit our dear General, had plainly hoodwinked Congress; and now our generous and noble Schuyler had again fallen a victim to nutmeg jealousy and cunning.

"Well," said I, "God help us all in Tryon, now; for a vain ass is in the saddle, and the counsel of the brave and wise remains unheeded. Will Guy Carleton drive us south of Crown Point?"

"I think so," said Ellerson, carelessly.

"Then the war will come among us here in Tryon!"

"Straight as a storm from the North, John."

"When?"

"Oh, that? God knows. We shall hold the lakes as long as we can. But unless we are reinforced by Continentals—unless every Colony sends us a regiment of their Lines—we can not hope to hold Crown Point, and that's sure as shooting and plain as preaching."

"Very well," said I between clenched teeth, "then we here in

Tryon had best go about the purging of that same county, and physic this district against a dose o' redcoats."

Ellerson laughed and rose with the lithe ease of a panther.

"I should be on my way to Albany," says he. "You tell me there are horses at the Summer House, John?"

"Certainly."

We shook hands.

"You find Morgan's agreeable?" inquired Nick.

"A grand corps, lad! Tim Murphy is my mate. And I think there's not a rifleman among us who can not shoot the whiskers off a porcupine at a hundred yards." And to me, with a nod toward my Oneidas: "They are painting. Do you march to-night, John?"

"A matter of cleaning out a Tory nest yonder," said I.

"A filthy business and not war," quoth he. "Well, God be with all friends to liberty, for all hell is rising up against us. A thousand Indians are stripped for battle on this frontier—and the tall ships never cease arriving crammed with redcoats and Germans.

"So we should all do our duty now, whether that same duty lie in emptying barrack slops, or in cleaning out a Tory nest, or in marching to drum and fife, or guarding the still places of the wilderness—it's all one business, John."

Again we shook hands all around, then, waving aside Joe de Golyer and his proffered lantern, the celebrated rifleman passed lightly into the shadows.

"Yonder goes the best shot in the North," said Nick.

"Saving only yourself and Jack Mount and Tim Murphy," remarked Godfrey Shew.

"As for the whiskers of a porcupine," quoth Nick, with the wild flare a-glimmering in his eyes, "why, I have never tried such a target. But I should pick any button on a red coat at a hundred yards—that is, if I cast and pare my own bullet, and load in my own fashion."

Silver swore that any rifle among us white men should shave an otter of his whiskers, as a barber trims a Hessian.

"Sacré garce!" cried he, "why should we miss—we coureurs-du-bois, who have learn to shoot by ze hardes' of all drill-masters—a empty belly!"

"We must not miss at Howell's house," said I, counting my people at a glance.

The Saguenay, ghastly in scarlet and white, came and placed himself behind me.

All the Oneidas were naked, painted from lock to ankle in terrific symbols.

Thiohero was still oiling her supple, boyish body when I started a brief description of the part each one of us was to act, speaking in the Oneida dialect and in English.

"Take these bloody men alive," I added, "if it can be done. But if it can not, then slay them. For every one of these that escapes tonight shall return one day with a swarm of hornets to sting us all to death in County Tryon! . . . Are you ready for the command?"

"Ready, John," says Nick.

"March!"

At midnight we had surrounded Howell's house, save only the east approach, which we still left open for tardy skulkers.

A shadowy form or two slinking out from the tamaracks, their guns trailing, passed along the hard ridge, bent nearly double to avoid observation.

We could not recognize them, for they were very shadows, vague as frost-driven woodcock speeding at dusk to a sheltered swamp.

But, as they arrived, singly and in little groups, such a silent rage possessed me that I could scarce control my rifle, which quivered to take toll of these old neighbors who were returning by stealth at night to murder us in our beds.

The Saguenay lay in the wild grasses on my left; the little maid of Askalege, in her naked paint, lay on my right hand. Her forefinger caressed the trigger of her new rifle; the stock lay close to her cheek. And I could hear her singing her *Karenna* in a mouse's whisper to herself:

"Listen, John Drogue,*
Though we all die,
You shall survive!
Listen, John Drogue,
This will happen,
And it is well,
Because I love you.

* *The Karenna of Thiohero*

Yi-ya-thon-dek, *John Drogue,*
Da-ed-e-wenh-he-i,
Engh-si-tsko-dak-i!
Yi-ya-thon-dek, *John Drogue,*
Nenne-a-wenni
Yo-ya-neri
Kenonwes!

"Why do I love you?
Because you are a boy-chief,
And we are both young,
Thou and I.
Why do I love you?
Because you are my elder brother,
And you speak to the Oneidas
Very gently.

"I am a prophetess;
I see events beforehand;
This is my Karenna:
Though we all die tonight,
You shall survive in Scarlet:
And this is well,
Because I love you."

So, crooning her prophecy, she lay flat in the wild grasses, cuddling the rifle-stock close to her shoulder; and her song's low cadence was like the burden of some cricket amid the herbage.

"Tharon alone knows all," I breathed in her ear.

"Neah!" she murmured; and touched her cheek against mine.

"Only God knows who shall survive tonight," I insisted.

"Onhteh. Ra-ko-wan-enh," * she murmured. "But I have seen you, *niare,*† through a mist, coming from this place, O-ne-kwen-da-ri-en.‡ And dead bodies lay about. Do you believe me?"

I made no reply but lay motionless, watching the tamaracks, ghostly in their cerements of silver fog. And I heard, through the low rhythm of her song, owls howling far away amid those spectral wastes, and saw the Oneida Dancers,§ very small and pale above the void.

I stared with fierce satisfaction at Howell's house. There was no gleam of light visible behind the closed shutters; but I already had counted nine men who came creeping to that silent rendezvous. And now there arrived the tenth man, running and stooping low; and went in by the east side of the house.

I waited a full minute longer, then whistled the whitethroat's call.

"Now!" said I to Thiohero; and we rose and walked forward through the light mist which lay knee-deep over the ground.

* Perhaps! He is Chief.
† Beforehand.
‡ Literally, in scarlet blood.
§ The Pleiades.

We had not advanced ten paces when three men, whom I had not perceived, rose up on the ridge to our right.

One of these shouted and fired a gun, and all three dropped flat again before we could realize what they had been about.

But already, out of that shadowy house, armed men swarmed like black hornets from their nest, and we ran to cut them from the tamaracks, but could not mark their flight in the so great darkness.

Then Nick Stoner struck flint, and dropped his tinder upon the remnants of a hay-stack, where wisps of last year's marsh grass still littered the rick.

In the smoky glow which grew I saw that great villain, Simon Girty, fire his gun at us, then turn and run toward the water; and Dries Bowman took after him, shouting in his fear.

Very carefully I fired at Girty, but he was not scotched, and was lost in the dark with Dries.

Then, in the increasing glow of the marsh-hay afire, I saw and recognized Elias Cady, and his venomous son, Charlie; and called loudly upon them to halt.

But they plunged into the shore reeds; and John and Phil Helmer at their heels; and we fired our guns into the dark, but could not stop them or again even hope to glimpse them in their flight.

But the Oneidas had now arrived between the tamaracks and the log house, and my Rangers were swiftly closing in on the west and south, when suddenly a couple of loud musket shots came from the crescents in the bolted shutters, hiding the west window in a double cloud of smoke.

I called out, "Halt!" to my people, for it was death to cross that circle of light ahead while the marsh-hay burned.

There were at least five men now barricaded in Howell's house. I called to Tahioni, the Wolf, and he came crouching and all trembling with excitement and impatience, like a fierce hound restrained.

"Take your people," said I, "and follow those dirty cowards who are fleeing toward the tamaracks."

Instantly his terrific panther-cry shattered the silence, and the Oneidas' wild answer to his slogan hung quavering over the Drowned Lands like the melancholy pulsations of a bell.

The hay-rick burned less brightly now. I crept out to the dark edge of the wavering glare and called across to those in the log-house:

"If you will surrender I promise to send you to Johnstown and

let a court judge you! If you refuse, we shall take you by storm, try you on the spot, and execute sentence upon you in that house! I allow you five minutes!"

At that, two of them fired in the direction from whence came my voice; and I heard their bullets passing, aimed too high.

Then John Howell's voice bawls out, "I know you, Drogue; and so help me God, I shall cut your throat before this business ends!—you dirty renegade and traitor to your King!"

Such a rage possessed me that I scarce knew what I was about, and I ran across the grass to the bolted door of the house, and fell to slashing at it with my hatchet like a madman.

They were firing now so rapidly that the smoke of their guns made a choking fog about the house; but the log cabin had no overhang, not being built for defense, and so they over-shot me whilst my hatchet battered splinters from the door and shook it almost from its hinges.

Some one was coughing in the thick, rifle-fog near me, and presently I heard Nick swearing and hammering at the door with his gun butt.

The French trappers, not so rash as we, lay close in the darkness, shooting steadily into the shutters at short range.

Shutters and door, though splintering, held; the defenders fired at my men's rifle-flashes, or strove to shoot at Nick and me, where we crouched low in the sheltered doorway; but they could not sufficiently depress the muzzles of their guns to hit us.

Suddenly, from out of the night, came a fire-arrow, whistling, with dry moss all aflame, and lodged on the roof of Howell's house.

Quoth Nick: "Your Tree-eater is in action, John. God send that the fire catch!"

From the darkness, Silver called out to me that the marsh-hay had nearly burned out, and what were he and Joe to do? Then came a-whizzing another fire-arrow, and another, but whether the dew was too heavy on the roof or the moss too damp, I do not know; only that when at length the roof caught fire, it was but a tiny blaze and flickered feebly, eating a slow way along the edges of the eaves.

Nick, who had been wrenching at the imbedded door stone, finally freed and lifted it, and hurled it at the bolted shutters. In they crashed. Then the door, too, burst open, and Tom Dawling rushed upon me with his rifle clubbed high above me.

"You damned Whig!" he shouted, "I'll knock your brains all over the grass!"

My hatchet in a measure fended the blow and eased its murderous force, but I stumbled to my knees under it; and Baltus Weed came to the window and shot me through the body.

At that, Gene Grinnis ran out o' the house to cut my throat, where like a crippled wild beast I floundered, a-kicking and striving to find my feet; and I saw Nick draw up and shoot Gene through the face, with a load of buck, so that where were his features suddenly became but a vast and raw hole.

Down he sprawled across my hurt legs; down tumbled John Howell, too, and Silver, a-clinging to him tooth and nail, their broad knives flashing and ripping and whipping into flesh.

Striving desperately to free me of Grinnis, and get up, I saw Tom Dawling throw his axe at Godfrey; and saw Luysnes shoot him, then seize him and cut his throat, even as he was falling.

Johnny Silver began bawling lustily for help, with John Howell atop of him, cursing him for a rebel and striving to disembowel him. De Golyer caught Howell by the throat, and Silver scrambled to his feet, his clothing in bloody ribbons. Then Joe's hatchet flashed level with terrific swiftness, crashing to its mark; and Howell pitched backward with his head clean split from one eye to the other, making of the top of his skull a lid which hung hinged only by the hairy skin.

Luysnes and the Saguenay were now somewhere inside the house a-chasing of Balty Weed; and I could hear Balty screaming, and the thud and clatter of loose logs as they dragged him down from the loft overhead.

Nick came panting to me where I sat on the bloody grass, feeling sick o' my wound and now vomiting.

"Are you bad?" he asked breathlessly.

"Balty shot me. . . . I don't know——"

Somebody knelt down behind me, and I laid back my head, feeling very sick and faint, but entirely conscious.

The awful screaming in the house had never ceased; Nick sat down on the grass and fumbled at my shirt with trembling fingers.

Presently the screaming ceased. Luysnes came out o' the house with a lighted lantern, followed by the Saguenay; and in the wavering radiance I saw behind them the feet of a man twitching above the floor.

"We hung the louse to the rafters," said Luysnes, "and your Indian asks your leave to scalp him as soon as he's done a-kicking."

"Let him have the scalp," said de Golyer, grimly. "He shot

John Drogue through the body. Shine your lantern on him, Ben."

They crowded around me. Nick opened my shirt and drew off my leggins. I saw Johnny Silver, in tatters and all drenched with blood, come into the lantern's rays.

"Are you bad hurt, John?" I gasped.

"Bah! Non, alors. Onlee has Howell slash my shirt into leetle rags and I am scratch all raw. Zat ees nozzing, mon capitaine—a leetle cut like wiz a Barlow—like zat! Pouf! Bah! I laugh. I make mock!"

"Your ribs are broken, John," says Nick, still squatting beside me. "I think your bones turned the bullet, and it's not lodged in your belly at all, but in your right thigh. . . . Fetch a sop o' wet moss, Joe!"

De Luysnes also got up and went away to chop some stout alders for a litter. De Golyer was back in a moment, both hands full of dripping sphagnum; and Nick washed away the mess of blood.

After that I was sick at my stomach again; and not clear in my mind what they were about.

I gazed around out of fevered eyes, and saw dead men lying near me. Suddenly the full horror of this civil war seemed to seize my senses;—all the shame of such a conflict, a black disgrace upon us here in County Tryon.

"Nick!" I cried, "in God's name give those men burial."

"Let them lie, damn them!" said Godfrey, sullenly.

"But they were our neighbors! I—I can't endure such a business. . . . And there are wolves in the tamaracks."

"Let wolf eat wolf," muttered Luysnes. But he drew his knife and went into the house. And I heard Balty's body drop when he cut it down.

Nick came over to me, where I lay on a frame of alders, over which a blanket had been thrown, and he promised that a burial party should come out here as soon as they got me into camp.

So two of my men lifted the litter, and, feeling sick and drowsy, I closed my eyes and felt the slow waves of pain sweep me with every step the litter-bearers took.

I had been lying in a kind of stupor upon my blanket, aware of dark figures passing to and fro before the lurid radiance of our watch fire, yet not heeding what they said and did, save only when I saw Nick and Luysnes go away carrying two ditch-spades.

And was vaguely contented to have the dead put safe from wolves.

Later, when I opened my burning eyes and asked for water, I saw Tahioni in the flushed light of dawn, and knew that my Indians had returned.

Nick filled my pannikin. When I had drunk, I felt very ill and could scarcely find voice to ask him how my Oneidas had made out in the tamaracks.

He admitted that they had not come up with the fugitives; and added that I was badly hurt and should be quiet and trouble my mind about nothing for the present.

One by one my Indians came gravely to gaze upon me, and I tried to smile and to speak to each, but my mind seemed confused, what with the burning of my body and my great weariness.

When again I unclosed my eyes and asked for water, I was lying under the open-faced shed, and it was brilliant sunshine outside.

Somebody had stripped me and had heated water in the kettle, and was bathing my body.

Then I saw it was the little maid of Askalege.

"Thiohero,—little sister?"

At the sound of my voice, she came and bent over me. In one hand she held a great sponge of steaming spaghnum.

Then came Nick, who leaned closer above me.

"Their young sorceress," said he, "has washed your body with bitter-bark and sumach, and has cleansed the wounds and stopped them with dry moss and balsam, so that they have ceased bleeding."

I turned my heavy eyes on the Oneida girl.

"Truly," said I, "I have come back through the mist, returning in scarlet. . . . My little sister is very wise."

She said nothing, but lifted a pannikin of cold water to my lips. It had bitter herbs in it, and, I think, a little gin. I satisfied my thirst.

"Little sister," I gasped, "is the hole that Balty made in my body so great that my soul shall presently escape?"

She answered calmly: "I have looked through the wound into your body; and I saw your soul there, watching me. Then I conjured your soul, which is very white, to remain within your body. And your soul, seeing that it was not the Eye of Tharon looking in to discover it, went quietly to sleep. And will abide within you."

She spoke in the Oneida dialect, and Nick listened impatiently, not understanding.

"What does the little Oneida witch say?" he demanded.

Her brother, Tahioni, the Wolf, answered calmly: "The River-reed is a witch and is as wise as the Woman of the Sounding Skies. The River-reed sees events beforehand."

"She says John Drogue will live?" demanded Nick.

"He shall surely live," said Thiohero, drawing the blanket over me.

"Well, then," said Nick, "in God's name let us get him to the Summer House, where the surgeon of the Continentals can treat him properly, and the ladies there nurse him——"

That roused me, and I strove to sit up, but could not.

"I shall not go to Summer House!" I cried. "If I am in need of a surgeon, bring him here; but I want no women near me!—I do not desire any woman at Summer House to nurse me or aid or touch me——"

In my angry excitement at the very remembrance of Lady Johnson and Claudia, and of Penelope, whom I had beheld in Steve Watts' arms—and of that man himself, who had come spying,—I forced my body upright, furious at the mere thought and swore I had rather die here in camp than be taken thither.

Then, suddenly my elbow crumpled under me, and I fell back in an agony of pain so great that presently the world grew swiftly black and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XX

IN SHADOW-LAND

WHEN I became conscious, I was lying under blankets upon a trundle-bed, within the four walls of a very small room. I wore a night-shift which was not mine, being finer and oddly ruffled; and under it my naked body was as stiff as a pike pole, and bound up like a mummy. My right thigh, too, was stiffly swathed and trussed, and I thought I should stifle from the heat of the blankets.

My mind was clear; I was aware of no sharp pain, no fever; but felt very weak, and could have slept again, only that perspiration drenched me and made me restless even as I dozed.

Sometime afterward—the same day, I think—I awoke in some pain, and realized that I was lying on my right side and that the wound in my thigh was being dressed.

The place smelled rank, like a pharmacy, and slightly sickened me.

There were several people in the little room. I saw Nick kneeling beside the bed, holding a pewter basin full of steaming water, and a Continental officer with his wristbands tucked up, choosing forceps from a battered leather case.

I could not move my body; my head seemed too heavy to lift; but I was aware of a woman standing close to where my head rested. I could see her two feet in their buckled shoes, and her petticoat of cotton stuff printed in flowers.

When the surgeon had done a-packing my wound with lint, pain had left me weak and indifferent, and I lay heavily, with lids closed.

Also, I had seen and heard enough to satisfy what languid curiosity I might have possessed. For I was in the gun-room at Summer House, whither, it appeared, they had taken me, despite my command to the contrary.

But now I was too weary to resent it; too listless to worry; too incurious to wonder who it might be that was at any pains to care for my broken body at Summer House Point.

Nick came, later, and I opened my eyes, but made no effort

to speak. He seemed pleased, however, and gave me a filthy and bitter draught, which I swallowed, but which so madded me that I swore at him.

Whereupon he smiled and wiped my lips and tucked in the accursed blankets that had been stifling me and which now scraped my unshaven chin.

"Damnation!" I whispered, "you smother me, drown me in sweat, and feed me gall and wormwood!"

And I closed my eyes to sleep; but found my mind not so inclined, and lay half dozing, conscious of the sunlight on the floor.

So I was awake when he arrived again with a pot o' broth.

"Can you not leave me in peace!" said I, so savagely that he laughed outright and bent over, stirring the broth and grinning down at me.

Spoonful by spoonful I swallowed the broth. There was wine in it. This made me drowsy.

To keep account of time, whether it were still this day or the next, or how the hours were passing, had been a matter of indifference to me. Or how the world wagged outside the golden dusk of this small room had interested me not at all.

My Continental surgeon, whom they called Dr. Thatcher, came twice a day and went smartly about his business.

Nick dosed me and fed me. I had asked no questions; but my mind had become sullen and busy; and now I was groping backward and searching memory to find the time and place when I had lost touch with the world and with the business which had brought me into these parts.

All was clearly linked up to the time that Balty shot me. Afterward, only fragments of the chain of events remained in my memory. I heard again the thud of Balty's body on the puncheon floor, when Luysnes cut him down from the rafters of Howell's house. I remember that I saw men take ditch-spades to bury the dead. I remember that my body seemed all afire and that I became enraged and forbade them to take me to Summer House.

Further—and of the blank spaces between—I had no recollection save that the whole world seemed burning up in darkness and that my body was being consumed like a fagot in some hellish conflagration, where the flames were black and gave no light.

This day Dr. Thatcher and Nick washed me and closed my wounds.

There had been, it appeared, some drains left in them. The stiff harness on my ribs they left untouched. I breathed, now, without any pain, but itched most damnably.

My closed wounds itched. I desired broth no longer and demanded meat. But got none and swore at Nick.

A barber from the Continental camp arrived to trim me. He took a beard from me that amazed me, and enough hair to awake the envy of a school-girl—for I refused to wear a queue, and bade him trim my pol à la Coureur-du-Bois.

Now this barber, who was a private soldier, seemed willing to gossip; and of him I asked my first questions concerning the outside world and train of events.

But I soon perceived that all he knew was the veriest camp gossip, and that his budget of rumours and reports was of no value whatever. For he said that our armies were everywhere victorious; that the British armies were on the run; and that the war would be over in another month. Everybody, quoth he, would become rich and happy, with General Washington for our King, and every general a duke or marquis, and every soldier a landed proprietor, with nothing to do save sit on his porch, smoke his pipe, and watch his slaves plow his broad acres.

When this sorry ass took his leave, I had long since ceased to listen to him.

I felt very well, except for the accursed itching where my flesh was mending, and rib-bones knitting.

Dr. Thatcher came in. He was booted, spurred, wore pistols and sword, and a military foot-mantle.

When he caught my eyes he smiled slightly and asked me how I did. And I expressed my gratitude as suitably as I knew how, saying that I was well and desired to rise and be about my business.

"In two weeks," he said, which took me aback.

"Do you know how long you have been here?" he asked, amused.

"Some three or four days, I suppose.

"A month today, Mr. Drogue."

This stunned me. He seated himself on the camp-stool beside my trundle-bed.

"What preys upon your mind, Mr. Drogue?" he asked pleasantly.

"Sir?"

"I ask you what it is that troubles you."

I felt a slow heat in my cheeks:

"I have nothing on my mind, sir, save desire to return to duty."

He said in his kindly way: "You would mend more quickly, sir, if your mind were tranquil."

I felt my face flush to my hair:

"Why do you suppose that my mind is uneasy, Doctor?"

"You have asked no questions. A sick man, when recovering, asks many. You seem to remain incurious, indifferent. Yet, you are in the house of old friends."

He looked at me out of his kind, grave eyes: "Also," he said, "you had many days of fever."

My face burned: I feared to guess what he meant, but now I must ask.

"Did I babble?"

"A feverish patient often becomes loquacious."

"Of—of whom did I—rave?" I could scarce force myself to the question. Then, as he also seemed embarrassed, I added: "You need not name her, Doctor. But I beg you to tell me who besides yourself overheard me."

"Only your soldier, Nicholas Stoner, and a Saguenay Indian, who squats outside your door day and night."

"Nobody else?"

"I think not."

"Has Lady Johnson heard me? Or Mistress Swift? Or—Mistress Grant?" I stammered.

"Why, no," said he. "These ladies were most tender and attentive when your soldiers brought you hither; but two days afterward, while you still lay unconscious,—and your right lung filling solid,—there came a flag from General Schuyler, and an escort of Albany Horse for the ladies. And they departed as prisoners the following morning, with their flag, to be delivered and set at liberty inside the British lines."

"They are gone?"

"Yes, sir. Lady Johnson, while happy in her prospective freedom, and hopeful of meeting her husband in New York City, seemed very greatly distressed to leave you here in such a plight. And Mistress Swift offered to remain and care for you, but our military authorities would not allow it."

I said nothing.

He added, with a faint smile: "Our authorities, I take it, were impatient to be rid of responsibility for these fair prisoners, Mr. Drogue. I know that Schuyler is vastly relieved."

"Has Stephen Watts been taken?" I asked abruptly. "Or Hare, or Butler?"

"Not that I have heard of."

So they had got clean away, that spying crew!—Watts and Hare and Walter Butler! Well, that was better. God knows I had a million times rather meet Steve Watts in battle than take him skulking here inside our lines a-spying on our camp, ex-

anging information with his unhappy sister and with Claudia, slinking about the shrubbery by night to press his sweetheart's nist and lips——

I turned my hot face on the pillow and lay a-thinking. The ctor laid back my blanket, looked at my hurts, then covered me.

"You do well," he said. "In two weeks you shall be out o' bed. ones must knit and wounds scar before you carry pack again. nd before your lung is strong you shall need six months rest e you take the field."

Aghast at such news, I asked him the true nature of my hurts, d learned that Balty's bullet had broken three ribs into my right ng, then, glancing, had made a hole clean through my thigh, t not splintering the bone.

"That Oneida girl of Thomas Spencer's saved you," said he, or she picked out the burnt wadding and bits of cloth, cleaned d checked the hemorrhage, and purged you. And there was no ngrene.

"She did all that anybody could have done; but the cold had ready seized your lung before she arrived, and it was that which volved you so desperately."

After a silence: "Good God, doctor! *Six months!*"

"Six months before you take the field, sir."

"A half year of idleness? Why, that can not be, sir——"

"It is better than eternity in a coffin, sir," said he quietly.

Then he came and took my hand, saying that orders had come recting him to join our Northern Army at Crown Point, and that was to set off within the hour.

"A little nursing and continued rest are all you now require," id he; "and so I leave you without anxiety, Mr. Drogue."

I strove to express my deep gratitude for his service to me; pressed my hand, smilingly:

"If you would hasten convalescence," said he, "seek to recover at serenity of mind which is a surer medicine than any in my ials."

At the door he turned and looked back to me:

"I think," said he in an embarrassed voice, "that you have ally no true reason for unhappiness, Mr. Drogue. If you have, en my experience of men and women has taught me nothing."

With that he went; and I heard his sword and spurs through e hallway, and the outer door close.

What had he meant?

For a long while I pondered this. Then into my mind came nother and inevitable question: *What* had I said in my delirium?

I was hungry when Nick came.

"Well," says he, grinning at me, "our Continental saw-bones permits this fat wild pigeon. And now I hope I shall have no more cursing to endure."

Tears came into my eyes and I held out my hand. It was blanched white, and bony, and lay oddly in his great, brown paw.

"Lord," says he, "what a fright you have given us, John, what with coughing all day and night like a sick bullock——"

"I am mending, Nick."

"So says Major Squills. Here, lad, eat thy pigeon. Does it smack? And here is a little Spanish wine in this glass to nourish you. I had three bottles of the Continentals ere they marched——"

"Marched! Have they departed?" I demanded in astonishment.

"Horse, foot, and baggage," said he cheerily. "When I say 'horse,' I mean young Jack-boots, for he departed first with the flag that took my Lady Johnson to New York."

"So everybody has gone," said I, blankly.

"Why, yes, John. The flag came from Schuyler and off went the ladies, bag, baggage, and servants.

"Then come Colonels Van Schaick and Dayton from Johnstown to inspect our works at this place and at Fish House. And two days later orders come to abandon Fish House and Summer House Point. . . . You do not remember hearing their drums?"

"No."

"You were very bad that day," he said soberly. "But when their music played you opened your eyes and nothing would do but you must rise and dress. Lord, how wild you talked, and I was heartily glad when their drumming died away on the Johnstown road."

"You mean to tell me that there is no longer any garrison on the Sacandaga?" I asked, amazed.

"None. And but a meagre one at Johnstown. It seems we need troops everywhere and have none to send anywhere. They've even taken your scout and your Oneidas."

"What!" I exclaimed.

"They left a week ago, John, to work on the new fort which is being fashioned out of old Fort Stanwix. So Dayton sends your scout thither to play with pick and mattock, and your Oneidas to prowl along Wood Creek and guard the batteaux."

"You tell me that the Sacandaga is left destitute of garrison or scouts!" I asked angrily. "And Tryon crawling alive with Tories!—and the Cadys and Helmers and Bowmans and Reeds

and Butlers and Hares and Stephen Watts stirring the disloyal to violence in every settlement betwixt Schnectady and Ballston!"

"I tell you we are too few for all our needs, John,—too few to watch all places threatened. Schuyler has but one regiment of Continentals now. Gates commands at Crown Point and draws to him all available men. His Excellency is pressed for men in the South, too. Albany is almost defenceless, Schenectady practically unguarded, and only a handful of our people guard Johnstown."

"Where are the militia?" I demanded.

"Farming—save when the district call sends a regiment on guard or to work on the forts. But Herkimer has them in hand against a crisis, and I have no doubt that those Palatines will turn out to a man if Sir John comes hither with his murderous hordes."

I sat in silence, picking the bones of my pigeon. Nick said:

"Colonel Dayton came in here and looked at you. And when he left he said to me that you had proven a valuable scout; and that, if you survived, he desired you to remain here at the Summer House with me and with your Saguenay."

"For what purpose?" I demanded, sullenly.

"On observation."

"A scout of three! To cover the Sacandaga! Do they think we have wings? Or are a company of tree-cats with nine lives apiece?"

"Well," said Nick, scratching his ear in perplexity, "I know not what our colonels and our generals are thinking; but the soldiers are gone, and our doctor has now departed, so if Dayton leaves us four people alone here in the Summer House it must be because there is nothing for the present to apprehend, either from Sir John or from any Indian or Tory marauders."

"*Four* people?" I repeated. "I thought you said we were but three here."

"Why," said he, "I mean that we are three men—three rifles!"

"Is there a servant woman, also?"

He looked at me oddly.

"The Caughnawaga girl came back."

"What!"

"The Scottish girl, Penelope."

"Came back! When?"

"Oh, that was long ago—after the flag left. . . . It seems she had meant to travel only to Mayfield with them. . . . She had not said so to anybody. But in the dark o' dawn she rides in on your mare, Kaya, having travelled all night long."

"'Why,' says I, 'what do you here on John Drogue's horse in the dark o' dawn?'

"'If there's danger,' says she calmly, 'this sick man should have a horse to carry him to Mayfield fort.'

"Which was true enough; and I said so, and stabled your mare where Lady Johnson's horses had left a warm and empty manger."

"Well," said I harshly, as he remained silent.

"Lord, Jack, that is all I know. She has cooked for you since, and has kept this house in order, washed dishes, fed the chickens and ducks and pig, groomed your horse, hoed the garden, sewed bandages, picked lint, knitted stockings and soldiers' vests——"

"Why?" I demanded.

"I asked her that, John. And she answered that there was nobody here to care for a sick man's comfort, and that Dr. Thatcher had told her you would die if they moved you to Johnstown hospital.

"I thought she'd become frightened and leave when the Continentals marched out; they all came—the officers—where she sat a-knitting by the apple-tree; but she only laughed at their importunities, made light of any dangers to be apprehended, and refused a seat on their camp wagon. And it pleased me, John, to see how doleful and crestfallen were some among those same young blue-and-buffs when they were obliged to ride away that morning and leave here there a-sewing up your shirt where Balty's bullet had rent it."

A slight thrill shot me through. But it died cold. And I thought of Steve Watts, and of her in his embrace under the lilacs.

If she now remained here it was for no reason concerning me. It was because she thought her lover might return some night and take her in his arms again. That was the reason.

And with this miserable conclusion, a more dreadful doubt seized me. What of the loyalty of a girl whose lover is a King's man?

I remembered how, in the blossoming orchard, she had whispered to me that she was a friend to liberty.

Was that to be believed of a maid whose lover came into our camp a spy?

I lay back on my pillow and closed my eyes. What was this girl to me that I should care one way or the other?

Nick took my platter and went away, leaving me to sleep as I seemed to desire it.

But I had no desire to sleep. And as I lay there, I became sensible that my entire and battered body was almost imperceptibly a-tremble.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEMON

I THINK that summer was the strangest ever I have lived,—the most unreal days of life,—so still, so golden, so strangely calm the solitude that ringed me where I was slowly healing of my hurt.

Each dawn was heralded by gold fire, each evening by a rosy conflagration in the west. It rained only at night; and all that crystal clear mid-summer scarcely a shred of fleece dappled the empyrean.

Those winds which blow so frequently in our Northland seemed to have become zephyrs, too; and there was but a reedy breeze along the Vlaie Water, and scarce a ripple to rock the lily pads in shallow reach and cove.

It was strange. And, only for the loveliness of night and day, there might have seemed in this hushed tranquillity around me a sort of hidden menace.

For all around about was war, where Tryon County lay so peacefully in the sunshine, ringed within the outer tumult, and walled on all sides by battle smoke.

Above us our fever-stricken Northern army, driven from Crown Point, now lay and sickened at Ticonderoga, where General Gates did now command our people, while poor Arnold, turned ship's carpenter, laboured to match Guy Carleton's flotilla which the British were dragging piecemeal over Chambly Rapids to blow us out o' the lake.

From south of us came news of the Long Island disaster where His Excellency, driven from Brooklyn and New York, now lay along the Harlem Heights.

And it was a sorry business; for Billy Alexander, who is Lord Stirling, was taken a prisoner; and Sullivan also was taken; and their two brigades were practically destroyed.

But worse happened at New York City, where the New York militia ran and two New England brigades, seized with panic, fled in a shameful manner. And so out o' town our people pulled foot, riotous and disorderly in retreat, and losing all our heavy

guns, nearly all our stores, and more than three hundred prisoners.

This was the news I had of the Long Island battle, where I lay in convalescence at Summer House that strange, still summer in the North.

And I thought very bitterly of what advantage was it that we had but just rung bells and fired off our cannon to salute our new Declaration of Independence, and had upset the prancing leaden King from his pedestal on the Bowling Green, if our militia ran like rabbits at sight of the red-coats, and general officers like Lord Stirling were mouse-trapped in their first battle.

Alas for poor New York, where fire and explosion had laid a third of the city in ruins; where the drums of the red-coats now rolled brazenly along the Broadway; where Delancy's horsemen scoured the island for friends to liberty; where that great wretch, Loring, lorded it like an unclean devil of the pit.

God! to think on it when all had gone so well; and Boston clean o' red-coats, and Canada all but in our grasp; and old Charleston shaking with her dauntless cannonade, and our people's volleys pouring into Dunmore's hirelings through the levelled cinders of Norfolk town!

What was the matter with us that these Southern gentlemen stood the British fire while, if we faced it, we crumpled and gave ground; or, if we shunned it, we ran disgracefully? Save only at Boston had we driven the red-coats on land. The British flame had scorched us on Long Island, singed us in New York, blasted us at Falmouth and Quebec, and left our armies writhing in the ashes from Montreal to Norfolk.

And yet how tranquil, how fair, how ominously calm lay our Valley Land in the sunshine, ringed here by our blue mountains where no slightest cloud brooded in an unstained sky!

And more still, more strange even than the untroubled calm of Tryon, lay the Summer House in its sunlit, soundless, and green desolation.

Where, through the long days, nothing moved on the waste of waters save where a sun-burnished reed twinkled. Where, under star-powdered skies, no wind stirred; and only the vague far cry of some wandering wild thing ever disturbed that vast and velvet silence.

Long before she came near me to speak to me, and even before she had glanced at me from the west porch, whither she took her knitting in the afternoons, I had seen Penelope.

From where I lay on my trundle in Sir William's old gun-

room I could see out across the hallway and through the door, where the west veranda ran.

In the mornings either my Indian, Yellow-Leaf, or Nick Stoner mounted guard there, watching the green and watery wastes to the northward, while his comrade freshened my sheets and pillows and cleansed my room.

In the afternoons one o' them went a-fishing or prowling after meat for our larder, or, sometimes, Nick went a-horse to Mayfield on observation, or to Johnstown for news or a bag of flour. And t'other watched from the veranda roof, which was railed, and ran all around the house, so that a man might walk post there and face all points of the compass.

As for Penelope, I soon learned her routine; for in the morning she was in the kitchen and about the house—save only she came not to my room—but swept and dusted the rest, and cooked in the cellar-kitchen.

Sometimes I could see her in apron and pink print, drawing water from the orchard well, and her skirt tucked up against the dew.

Sometimes I saw her early in the garden, where greens grew and beans and peas; or sometimes she hoed weeds where potatoes and early corn stood in rows along a small strip planted between orchard and posy-bed.

And sometimes I could see her a-milking our three Jersey cows, or, with a sickle, cutting green fodder for my mare, Kaya, whose dainty hoofs I often heard stamping the barn floor.

But after the dinner hour, and when the long, still afternoons lay listlessly betwixt mid-summer sun and the pale, cool dusk, she came from her chamber all freshened like a faint, sweet breeze in her rustling petticoat of sheer, sprigged stuff, to seat herself on the west veranda with her knitting.

Day after day I lay on my trundle where I could see her. She never noticed me, though by turning her head she could have seen me where I lay.

I do not now remember clearly what was my state of mind except that a dull bitterness reigned there.

Which was, of course, against all common sense and decent reason.

I had no claim upon this girl. I had kissed her—through no fault of hers, and by no warrant and no encouragement from her to so conduct in her regard.

I had kissed her once. But other men had done that perhaps with no more warrant. And I, though convinced that the girl

knew not how to parry such surprises, brooded sullenly upon mine own indiscretion with her; and pondered upon the possible behaviour of other men with her. And I silently damned their impudence, and her own imprudence which seemed to have taught her little in regard to men.

But in my mind the chiefest and most sullen trouble lay in what I had seen under the lilacs that night in June.

And when I closed my eyes I seemed to see her in Steve Watts' arms, and the lad's ardent embrace of her throat and hair, and the flushed passion marring his youthful face——

I often lay there, my eyes on her where I could see her through the door, knitting, and strove to remember how I had first heard her name spoken, and how at that last supper at the Hall her name was spoken and her beauty praised by such dissolute young gallants as Steve Watts and Lieutenant Hare; and how even Sir John had blurted out, in his cups, enough to betray an idle dalliance with this yellow-haired girl, and sufficient to affront his wife and his brother-in-law, and to disgust me.

And Nick had said that men swarmed about her like forest-flies around a pan o' syrup!

And all this, too, before ever I had laid eyes upon this slim and silent girl who now sat out yonder within my sullen vision, knitting or winding her wool in silence.

What, then, could be the sentiments of any honest man concerning her? What, when I considered these things, were my own sentiments in her regard?

And though report seemed clear, and what I had witnessed plainer still, I seemed to be unable to come to any conclusion as to my true sentiments in this business, or why, indeed, it was any business of mine, and why I concerned myself at all.

Men found her young and soft and inexperienced; and so stole from her the kiss that heaven sent them.

And Steve Watts, at least, was more wildly enamoured. . . . And, no doubt, that reckless flame had not left her entirely cold. . . . Else how could she have strolled away to meet him that same night when her lips must still have felt the touch of mine? . . . And how endured his passion there in the starlight? . . . And if she truly were a loyal friend to liberty, how in God's name give secret tryst and countenance to a spy?

One morning, when Nick had bathed me, I made him dress me in forest leather. Lord, but I was weak o' the feet, and light in head as a blown egg-shell!

Thus, dressed, I lay all morning on my trundle, and there, seated on the edge, was given my noon dinner.

But I had no mind, now, to undress and rest. I desired to go to the veranda, and did fume and curse and bully poor Nick until he picked me up and carried me thither and did seat me within a large and cushioned Windsor chair.

Then, madded, he went away to fish for a silver pike in our canoe, saying with much viciousness that I might shout my throat raw and perish there ere he would stir a foot to put me to bed again.

So I watched him go down to the shore where the canoe lay, lift in rod and line and paddle, and take water in high dudgeon.

"Even an ass knows when he's sick!" he called out to me. But I laughed at him and saw his broad paddle stab the water, and the birchen craft shoot out among the reeds.

Now it was in my thoughts to see how Mistress Penelope would choose to conduct, who had so long and so tranquilly ignored me.

For here was I established upon the spot where she had been accustomed to sit through the long afternoons . . . and think on Steve Watts, no doubt! . . .

Comes Mistress Penelope in sprigged gown of lavender, and smelling fresh of the herb itself or of some faint freshness.

I rested both hands upon the arms of my Windsor chair and so managed to stand erect.

She turned rosy to her ear-tips at the sudden encounter, but her voice was self-possessed and in nowise altered when she greeted me.

I offered my hand; she extended hers and I saluted it.

Then she seated herself at leisure in her Windsor reading-chair, laid her basket of wool-skeins upon the polished book-rest, and calmly fell to knitting.

"So, you are mending fast, sir," says she; and her smooth little fingers travelling steadily with her shining needles, and her dark eyes intent on both.

"Oh, for that," said I, "I am well enough, and shall soon be strong to strap war-belt and sling pack and sack. . . . Are you in health, Mistress Pen?"

She expressed thanks for the civil inquiry. And knitted on and on. And silence fell between us.

If it was then that I first began to fear I was in love with her, I do not surely remember now. For if such a doubt assailed me, then instantly my mind resented so unwelcome a notion. And not only was there no pleasure in the thought, but it stirred

in me a kind of breathless anger which seemed to have long slumbered in its own ashes within me and now gave out a dull heat.

"Have you news of Lady Johnson and of Mistress Swift?" I asked at last.

She lifted her eyes in surprise.

"No, sir. How should news come to us here?"

"I thought there might be channels of communication."

"I know of none, sir. York is far, and the Canadas are farther still. No runners have come to Summer House."

"Still," said I, "communication was possible when I got my hurt last June."

"Sir?"

"Is that not true?"

She looked at me in troubled silence.

"Did not Lady Johnson's brother come here in secret to give her news, and take as much away?"

She did not answer.

"Once," said I, "although I had not asked, you told me that you were a friend to liberty."

"And am so," said she.

"And have a Tory lover."

At that her face flamed and her wool dropped into her lap. She did not look at me but sat with gaze ahead of her as though considering.

At last: "Do you mean Captain Watts?" she asked.

"Yes, I mean him."

"He is not my lover."

"I ask your pardon. The inference was as natural as my error."

"Sir?"

"Appearances," said I, "are proverbially deceitful. Instead of saying 'your lover,' I should, perhaps, have said '*one* of your lovers.' And so again ask pardon."

"Are you my lover, sir?"

"I?" said I, taken aback at the direct shot so unexpected.

"Yes, you, my lord. Are you one of my lovers?"

"I think not. Why do you ask me that which never could be a question that yes or no need answer?"

"I thought perhaps you might deem yourself my lover."

"Why?"

"Because you kissed me once,—as did Captain Watts. . . . And two other gentlemen."

"Two other gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir. A cornet of horse,—his name escapes me—and Sir John."

"Who!" I blurted angrily.

"Sir John Johnson."

"The dissolute beast!" said I. "Had I known it that night at Johnson Hall——" But here I checked my speech and waited till the hot blood in my face was done burning.

And when again I was cool: "I am sorry for my heat," said I. "Your conduct is your own affair."

"You once made it yours, sir,—for a moment."

Again I went hot and red; and how I had conducted with this maid plagued me so that I found no word to answer.

She knitted for a little while. Then, lifting her dark young eyes:

"You have as secure a title to be my lover as has any man, Mr. Drogue. Which is no title at all."

"Steve Watts took you in his arms near the lilacs."

"What was that to you, Mr. Drogue?"

"He was a spy in our uniform and in our camp!"

"Yes, sir."

"And you gave him your lips."

"He took what he took. I gave only what was in my heart to give to any friend in peril."

"What was that?"

"Solicitude."

"Oh. You warned him to leave? And he an enemy and a spy?"

"I begged him to go, Mr. Drogue."

"Do you still call yourself a friend to liberty?" I asked angrily.

"Yes, sir. But I was his friend too. I did not know he had come here. And when by accident I recognized him I was frightened, because I thought he had come to carry news to Lady Johnson."

"And so he did! Did he not?"

"He said he came for me."

"To visit you?"

"Yes, sir. And I think that was true. For when he made himself known to his sister, she came near to fainting; and so he spoke no more to her at all but begged me for a tryst before he left."

"Oh. And you granted it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I was in great fright, fearing he might be taken. . . . Also I pitied him."

"Why so?" I sneered.

"Because he had courted me at Caughnawaga. . . . And at first I think he made a sport of his courting,—like other young men of Tryon gentry who hunt and court to a like purpose. . . . And so, one day at Caughnawaga, I told him I was honest. . . . I thought he ought to know, lest folly assail us in unfamiliar guise and do us a harm."

"Did you so speak to this young man?"

"Yes, sir. I told him that I am a maiden. I thought it best that he should know as much. . . . And so he courted me no more. But every day he came and glowered at other men. . . . I laughed secretly, so fiercely he watched all who came to Cayadutta Lodge. . . . And then Sir John fled. And war came. . . . Well, sir, there is no more to tell, save that Captain Watts dared come hither."

"To take you in his arms?"

"He did so,—yes, sir,—for the first time ever."

"Then he is honestly in love with you?"

"But you, also, did the like to me. Is it a consequence of honest love, Mr. Drogue, when a young man embraces a maiden's lips?"

Her questions had so disconcerted me that I found now no answer to this one.

"I know nothing about love," said I, looking out at the sunlit waters.

"Nor I," said she.

"You seem willing to be schooled," I retorted.

"Not willing, not unwilling. I do not understand men, but am not averse to learning something of their ways. No two seem similar, Mr. Drogue, save in the one matter."

"Which?" I asked bluntly.

"The matter of paying court. All seem to do it naturally, though some take fire quicker, and some seem to burn more ardently than others."

"It pleasures you to be courted? Gallantries suit you? And the flowery phrases suitors use?"

"They pleasurably perplex me. Time passes more agreeably when one is knitting. To be courted is not an unwelcome diversion to any woman, I think. And flowery phrases are pleasant to notice,—like music suitably played, and of which one is conscious though occupied with other matters."

"If this be not coquetry," I thought, "then it is most perilously akin to it."

Obscurely yet deeply disturbed by the blind stirring of emotions I could not clearly analyze, I sat brooding there. Now I watched her fingers playing with the steels, and her young face lowered; now I gazed afar across the blue Vlaie Water to the bluer mountains beyond, which dented the horizon as the great blue waves of Lake Ontario make molten mountains against an azure sky.

So still was the world that the distant leap and splash of a great silver pike sounded like a gun-shot in that breathless, sun-drenched solitude.

Yet I found no solace now in all this golden peace; for, of the silence between this maid and me, had been born a vague and malicious thing; and like a subtle demon it had come, now, into my body to turn me sullen and restless with the scarce-formed, scarce-comprehended thoughts it hatched within me. And one of these had to do with Stevie Watts, and how he had come here for the sake of this girl. . . . And had taken her into his arms under the stars, near the lilacs. . . . And my lips still warm from hers. . . . Yet she had gone to him in the dusk. . . . Was afeard for him. . . . Pitied him. . . . And doubtless loved him, whatever she might choose to say to me. . . . Under any circumstances a coquette; and, innocent or wise, to the manner born at any rate. . . . And some Tryon County gallant likely to take her measure some day ere she awake from her soft bewilderment at the ways and conducting of mankind.

Nick came at eventide, carrying a pike by the gills, and showed us his fingers bleeding of the watery conflict.

"Is all calm on the Sacandaga?" I enquired.

"Calm as a roadside puddle, Jack. And every day I ask myself if there be truly any war in North America or no, so placid shines God's sun on Tryon. . . . You mend apace, old friend. Do you suffer fatigue?"

"None, Nick. I shall sit at table tonight with Mistress Grant and you——"

My voice ceased, and, without warning, the demon that had entered into me began a-whispering. Then the first ignoble and senseless pang of jealousy assailed me to remember that this girl and my comrade had been alone for weeks together—supped all alone at table—companioned each the other while I lay ill!——

Senseless, miserable clod that I was to listen to that demon's whispering till my very belly seemed sick-sore with the pain of it and my heart hurt me under the ribs.

Now she rose and looked at Nick and laughed; and they said a word or two I could not quite hear, but she laughed again as though with some familiar understanding, and went lightly away to her evening milking.

"We shall be content indeed," said Nick, "that you sit at supper with us, old friend."

But I had changed my mind, and said so.

"You will not sit with us tonight?" he asked, concerned.

I looked at him coldly:

"I shall go to bed," said I, "and desire no supper. . . . Nor any aid whatever. . . . I am tired. The world wearies me. . . . And so do my own kind."

And I got up and all alone walked to my little chamber.

So great an ass was I.

CHAPTER XXII

HAG-RIDDEN

SO passed that unreal summer of '76; and so came autumn upon us with its crimsons, purples, and russet-gold; its cherry-red suns a-swimming in the flat marsh fogs; its spectral mists veiling Vlaie Water and curtaining the Sacandaga from shore to shore.

Rumours of wars came to us, but no war; gossip of armies and of battles, but no battles.

Armies of wild-fowl, however, came to us on the great Vlaie; duck and geese and companies of snowy swans; and at night I could hear their fairy trumpets in the sky heralding the white onset from the North.

And pigeons came to the beech-woods, millions and millions, so that their flight was a windy roaring in the sky and darkened the sun.

Birches and elms and chestnuts and soft maples turned yellow; and so turned the ghostly tamaracks ere their needles fell. Hard maples and oaks grew crimson and scarlet and the blueberry bushes and sumachs glowed like piles of fire.

But the world of pines darkened to a deeper emerald; spruce and hemlock took on a more sober hue; and the flowing splendour of the evergreens now robed plain and mountain in sombre magnificence, dully brocaded here and there by an embroidery of silver balsam.

When I was strong enough to trail a rifle and walk my post on the veranda roof, my Saguenay Indian took to the Drowned Lands, scouting the meshed water-leads like a crested diving-duck; and his canoe nosed into every creek from Mayfield to Fish House.

Nick foraged, netting pigeons on the Stacking Ridge, shooting partridge, turkey, and squirrel as our need prompted, or dropping a fat doe at evening on the clearing's edge beyond Howell's house.

Of fish we had our fill,—chain-pike and silver-pike from Vlaie Water; trout out of Hans Creek and Frenchman's Creek.

Corn, milled grain, and pork we drew a-horse from Johnstown or Mayfield; we had milk and butter of our own cows, and roasting ears and potatoes, squash, beets, and beans, and a good

pumpkin for our pies, all from Summer House garden. And a great store of apples—for it was a year for that fruit—and we had so many that Nick pitted scores of bushels; and we used them to eat, also, and to cook.

Now, against first frost, Penelope had sewed for us sacks out o' tow cloth; and when frost came to moss the world with spongy silver, we went after nuts, Nick and I,—chestnuts from the Stacking Ridge, and gathered beechnuts there, also. Butternuts we found, sticky and a-plenty, along the Sacandaga; and hickory nuts on every ridge, and hazel filberts bordering clearing and windfall in low, moist woods.

Sure we were well garnered if not well garrisoned at Summer House when the first snow flakes came a-drifting like errant feathers floating from a wild-fowl shot in mid-air.

The painted leaves dropped in November, settling earthward through still sunshine in gold and crimson clouds.

"Mother Earth hath put on war-paint," quoth Penelope, knitting. She spoke to Nick, turning her head slightly. She spoke chiefly to him in these days, I having become, as I have said, a silent ass; and so strange and of so infrequent speech that they did not even venture to remark to me my reticence; and I think they thought my hurt had changed me in my mind and nature. Yet I was but a simple ass, differing only from other asses in that they brayed more frequently than I.

In silence I nursed a challenging in my breast, where love should have lain secure and warm; and I wrapped the feverish, mewling thing in envy, jealousy, and sullen pride,—fit rags to swaddle such a waif.

For once, coming upon Penelope unawares, I did see her gazing upon a miniature picture of Steve Watts, done bravely in his red regimentals.

Which, perceiving me, she hid in her bosom and took her milk-pails to the orchard without a word spoken, though the colour in her face was eloquent enough.

And very soon, too, I had learned for sure what I already believed of her, that she was a very jade; for it was plain that she had now ensnared Nick, and that they were thick as a pair o' pup hounds, and had confidences between them in low voices and with smiles. Which my coming checked only so far. For it was mostly to him she spoke openly at table, when, the smoking dishes set, she took her seat between us, out o' breath and sweet as a sun-hot rose.

God knows they were not to blame; for in one hour I might

prove glum and silent as a stone; and in another I practiced carelessness and indifference in my speech; and in another, still, I was like to be garrulous and feverish, insisting upon any point raised; laughing without decent provocation; moody and dull, loquacious and quarrelsome by turns,—unstable, unhinged, out o' balance and incapable of any decent equilibrium. Oh, the sorry spectacle a young man makes when that sly snake, jealousy, hath fanged him!

And my disorder was such that I knew I was sick o' jealousy and sore hurt of it to the bones, yet conducted like a mindless creature that, trapped, falls to mutilating itself.

And so I was ever brooding how I might convince her of my indifference; how I might pain her by coldness; how I might subtly acquaint her of my own desirability and then punish her by a display of contempt and a mortifying revelation of the unattainable. Which was to be my proper self.

Jealousy is sure a strange malady and breaketh out in divers disorders in different young men, according to their age and kind.

I was jealous because she had been courted by others; was jealous because she had been caressed by other men; I was wildly jealous because of Steve Watts, their tryst by the lilacs; his picture which I discovered she wore in her bosom; I was madly jealous of her fellowship with my old comrade, Nick, and because, chilled by my uncivil conduct and by my silences, she conversed with him when she spoke at all.

And for all this silly grievance I had no warrant nor any atom of lucid reason. For until I had seen her no woman had ever disturbed me. Until that spring day in the flowering orchard I had never desired love; and if I even desired it now I knew not. I had certainly no desire for marriage or a wife, because I had no thought in my callow head of either.

Only jealousy of others and a desire to be first in her mind possessed me,—a fierce wish to clear out this rabble of suitors which seemed to gather in a very swarm wherever she passed,—so that she should turn to me alone, lean upon me, trust only me in the world to lend her countenance, shelter her, and defend her. And, though God knows I meant her no wrong, nor had passion, so far, played any rôle in this my ridiculous behaviour, I had not so far any clear intention in her regard. A fierce and selfish longing obsessed me to drive others off and keep her for my own where in some calm security we could learn to know each other.

And this—though I did not understand it—was merely the

romantic desire of a very young man to study, unhurried and untroubled, the first female who ever had disturbed his peace of mind.

But all was vain and troubled and misty in my mind, and love—or its fretful changeling—weighed on my heart heavily. But I carried double weight: jealousy is a heavy hag, and I was hag-ridden morn and eve and all the livelong day to boot.

All asses are made to be ridden.

The first snow came, as I have said, like shot-scattered down from a wild-duck's breast. Then days of golden stillness, with mornings growing ever colder and the frost whitening shady spots long after sun-up.

I remember a bear swam Vlaie Water, but galloped so swiftly into the bush that no rifle was ready to stop him.

We mangered our cattle o' nights; and, as frosty grazing checks milk flow, Nick and I brought in hay from the stacks which the Continental soldiers had cut against a long occupation of Summer House Point.

Nights had become very cold and we burned logs all day long in the chimney place. My Indian was snug enough in the kitchen by the oven, where he ate and slept when not on post; and we, above, did very well by the blaze where we roasted nuts and apples and drank new cider from Johnstown and had a cask of ale from the Johnson Arms by waggon.

Also, in the cellar, was some store of Sir William's—dusty bottles of French and Spanish wines; but of these I took no toll, because they belonged not to me.

But a strange circumstance presently placed these wines in my possession; for, upon a day before the first deep snow fell, comes galloping from Johnstown a man in caped riding coat, one Jerry Van Rensselaer, to nail a printed placard upon our Summer House—notice of sale by the Committee for Sequestration.

But who was to read this notice and attend the vendue save only the birds and beasts of the wilderness I do not know; for on the day of the sale, which was conducted by Commissioner Harry Outthout, only some half dozer farmer folk rode hither from Johnstown, and only one man among 'em bid in money—a sullen fellow named Jim Huetson, who had Tory friends, I knew, if he himself were not of that complexion.

His bid was £5; which was but a beggarly offer, and angered me to see Sir William's beloved Lodge come to so mean an end. So, having some little money, I showed the Schoharie fellow a stern countenance, doubled his bid, and took snuff which I do not love.

And Lord! Ere I realized it, Summer House Point, Lodge and contents, and riparian rights as far as Howell's house were mine; and a clear deed promised.

Bewildered, I signed and paid the Sequestration Commissioner out o' my buckskin pouch in hard coin.

"You should buy the cattle, too," whispered Nick. "There be folk in Johnstown would pay well for such a breed o' cow. And there's the pig, Jack, and the sheep and the hens, and all that grain and hay so snug in the barn."

So I asked very fiercely if any man desired to bid against me; and neither Huetson nor his sulky comrade, Davis, having any such stomach, I fetched ale and apples and nuts and made them eat and drink, and so drew aside the Commissioner and bargained with him like a Jew or a shoe-peg Yankee; and in the end bought all.*

"Shall you move hither from Fonda's Bush and sell your house?" asked Nick, who now was going out on watch.

But I made him no answer, for I had been bitten by an idea, the mere thought of which fevered me with excitement. Oh, I was mad as a March fox running his first vixen, in that first tide of romantic love,—clean daft and lacking reason.

So when Commissioner Outthout and those who had come for the vendue had drank as much of my new ale as they cared to carry home ahorse, and were gone a-bumping down the Johnstown road like a flock of Gilpins all, I took my parchment and went into my bed chamber; and there I sat upon my trundle bed and read what was writ upon my deed, making me the owner of Summer House and of all that appertained to the little hunting lodge.

But I had not purchased it selfishly; and the whole business began with an impulse born of love for Sir William, who had loved this place so well. But even as that impulse came, another notion took shape in my love-addled sconce.

I sat on my trundle bed a-thinking and—God forgive me—admiring my own lofty and romantic purpose.

The house was still, but on the veranda roof overhead I could hear the moccasined tread of Nick pacing his post; and from below in the kitchen came the distant thump and splash of Penelope's churn, where she was making new butter for to salt it against our needs.

Now, as I rose my breath came quicker, but admiration for

* The Commissioners for selling real estate in Tryon County sold the personal property of Sir John Johnson some time before the Hall and acreage were sold. The Commissioners appointed for selling confiscated personal property in Tryon County were appointed later, March 6, 1777.

my resolve abated nothing—no!—rather increased as I tasted the sad pleasures of martyrdom and of noble renunciation. For I now meant to figure in this girl's eyes in a manner which she never could forget and which, I trusted, might sadden her with a wistful melancholy after I was gone and she had awakened to the irreparable loss.

When I came down into the kitchen where, bare of arms and throat, she stood a-churning, she looked at me out of partly-lowered eyes, as though doubting my mood—poor child. And I saw the sweat on her flushed cheeks, and her yellow hair, in disorder from the labour, all curled into damp little ringlets. But when I smiled I saw that lovely glimmer dawning, and she asked me shyly what I did there—for never before had I come into her kitchen.

So, still smiling, I gave an account of how I had bought Summer House; and she listened, wide-eyed, wondering.

"But," continued I, "I have already my own glebe at Fonda's Bush, and a house; but there be many with whom fortune has not been so complacent, and who possess neither glebe nor roof, yet deserve both."

"Yes, sir," she said, smiling, "there be many such folk and always will be in the world. Of such company am I, also, but it saddens me not at all."

I went to her and showed her my deed, and she looked down on it, her hands clasped on the churn handle.

"So that," said she, "is a lawful deed! I have never before been shown such an instrument."

"You shall have leisure enough to study this one," said I, "for I convey it to you."

"Sir?"

"I give Summer House to you," said I. "Here is the deed. When I go to Johnstown again I will execute it so that this place shall be yours."

She gazed at me in dumb astonishment.

"Meanwhile," said I, "you shall keep the deed. . . . And now you are, in fact, if not yet in title, mistress of Summer House. And I think, this night, we should break a bottle of Sir William's Madeira to drink health to our new châtelaine."

She came from her churn and caught my arm, where I had turned to ascend the steps.

"You are jesting, are you not, my lord?"

"No! And do not use that term, 'lord,' to me."

"You—you offer to give me—*me*—this estate!"

"Yes. I do give it you."

There was a tense silence.

"Why do you offer this?" she burst out breathlessly.

"Why should I have two estates and you have none, Penelope?"

"But that is no reason!" she retorted, almost violently. "For what reason, then, do you give me Summer House? It—it must be you are jesting, my lord!——"

At that, displeasure made me redden, and I damned the title under my breath.

"If you please," said I, "you will have done with all these 'sirs' and 'my lords,' for I am a plain yoeman of County Tryon and wear a buckskin shirt. Not that I would criticise Lord Stirling or any such who still care to wear by courtesy what I have long ago worn out," I added, "but the gentry and nobility of Tryon travel one way and I the other; and my friends should remember it when naming me."

She stood looking at me out of her brown eyes, and slowly their troubled wonder changed to dumb perplexity. And, looking, took up her apron's edge and stood twisting it between both hands.

"I give you Summer House," said I, "because you are orphaned and live alone and have nothing. I give it because a maid ought to possess a portion; and, thirdly, I give it because I have enough of my own, and never desired more of anything than I need. So take the Summer House, Penelope, with the cattle and fowl and land; for it gives you a station and a security among men and women of this odd world of ours, and lends to yourself a confidence and dignity which only sheerest folly can overthrow."

She came, after a silence, slowly, and took me by the hand.

"John Drogue," says she in a voice not clear, "I can not take of you this estate."

"You shall take it! And when again, where you sit a-knitting, the young men gather round you like flies around a sap-pan—then, by God, you shall know what countenance to give them, and they shall know what colour to give their courting!—suitors, gallants, Whig or Tory—the whole damned rabble——"

"Oh," she cried softly, "John Drogue!" And fell a-laughing—or was it a quick sob that checked her throat?

But I heeded it not, having caught fire; and presently blazed noisily.

"Because you are servant to Douw Fonda!" I cried, "and because you are alone, and because you are young and soft with a child's eyes and yellow hair, they make nothing of schooling

you to their pot-house gallantries, and every damned man jack among them comes a-galloping to the chase. Yes, even that pallid beast, Sir John!—and the tears of Claire Putnam to haunt him if he were a man and not the dirty libertine he is!"

I looked upon her whitened face in ever-rising passion:

"I tell you," said I, "that the backwoods aristocracy is the better and safer caste, for the other is rotten under red coat or blue; and a ring-tailed cap doffed by a gnarled hand is worth all your laced cocked hats bound around with gold and trailed in the dust with fine, smooth fingers!"

Sure I was in a proper phrensy now, nor dreamed myself a target for the high gods' laughter, where I vapoured and strode and shouted aloud my moral jeremiad.

"So," said I, "you shall have Summer House; and shall, as you sit a-knitting, make your choice of honest suitors at your ease and not be waylaid and hunted and used without ceremony by the first young hot-head who entraps you in the starlight! No! Nor be the quarry of older villains and subtler with persuasion. No!

"For today Penelope Grant, spinster, is a burgesse of Johnstown, and is a person both respectable and taxed. And any man who would court her must conduct suitably and in a customary manner, nor, like a wild falcon, circle over head awaiting the opportunity to strike.

"No! All that sport—all that gay laxity and folly is at an end. And here's the damned deed that ends it!" I added, thrusting the parchment into her hands.

She seemed white and frightened. And, "Oh, Lord!" she breathed, "have I, then, conducted so shamelessly? And did I so wholly lose your favour when you kissed me?"

I had not meant that, and I winced and grew hot in the cheeks.

"I am not a loose woman," she said in her soft, bewildered way. "Unless it be a fault that I find men somewhat to my liking, and their gay manners pleasure me and divert me."

I said: "You have a way with men. None is insensible to your youth and beauty."

"Is it so?" she asked innocently.

"Are you not aware of it?"

"I had thought that I pleased."

"You do so. Best tread discreetly. Best consider carefully now. Then choose one and dismiss the rest."

"Choose?"

"Aye."

"Whom should I choose, John Drogue?"

"Why," said I, losing countenance, "there is the same ardent rabble like that plague of suitors which importuned the Greek Penelope. There are the sap-pan flies all buzzing."

"Oh. Should I make a choice if entreated?"

"A burgesse is free to choose."

"Oh. And to which suitor should I give my smile?"

"Well," said I, sullenly, "there is Nick. There also is your Cornet of Horse—young Jack-boots. And there is the young gentleman whose picture you wear in your bosom."

"Captain Watts?" she asked, so naïvely that jealousy stabbed me instantly, so that my smile became a grimace.

"Sure," said I, "you think tenderly on Stephen Watts."

"Yes."

"In fact," I almost groaned, "you entertain for him those virtuous sentiments not unbecoming to the maiden of his choice. . . . Do you not, Penelope?"

"He has courted me a year. I find him agreeable. Also, I pity him—although his impatience causes me concern and his ardour inconveniences me. . . . The sentiments I entertain for him are virtuous, as you say, sir. And so are my sentiments for any man."

"But is not your heart engaged in this affair?"

"With Captain Watts?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I thought you meant with you, sir."

I affected to smile, but my heart thumped my ribs.

"I have not pretended to your heart, Penelope."

"No, sir. Nor I to yours. And, for the matter, know nothing concerning hearts and the deeper pretensions to secret passions of which one hears so much in gossip and romance. No, sir; I am ignorant. Yet, I have thought that kindness might please a woman more easily than sighs and vapours. . . . Or so it seems to me. . . . And that impatient ardour only perplexes. . . . And passion often chills the natural pity that a woman entertains for any man who vows he is unhappy and must presently perish of her indifference. . . .

"Yet I am not indifferent to men. . . . And have used men gently. . . . And forgiven them. . . . Being not hard but pitiful by disposition."

She made a movement of unconscious grace and drew from her bosom the little picture of Steve Watts.

"You see," said she, "I guard it tenderly. But he went off in a passion and rebuked me bitterly for my coquetry and because

I refused to flee with him to Canada. . . . He, being an enemy to liberty, I would not consent. . . . I love my country. . . . And better than I love any man."

"He begged an elopement that night?"

"Yes."

"With marriage promised, doubtless."

"Lord," says she, "I had not thought so far."

"Did he not promise it?"

"No, sir."

"What? Nor mention it?"

"I did not hear him."

"But in his courtship of a year surely he conducted honestly!" I insisted angrily.

"Should a man ask marriage when he asks love, Mr. Drogue?"

"If he means honestly he must speak of it."

"Oh. . . . I did not understand. . . . I thought that love, offered, meant marriage also. . . . I thought they all meant that —save only Sir John."

We both fell silent. After a little while: "I shall some day ask Captain Watts what he means," said she, thoughtfully. "Surely he must know I am a maiden."

"Do you suppose such young men care!" I said sullenly.

But she seemed so white and distressed at the thought that the sneer died on my lips and I made a great effort to do generously by my old school-mate, Stevie Watts.

"Surely," said I, "he meant no disrespect and no harm. Stephen Watts is not of the corrupt breed of Walter Butler nor debauched like Sir John. . . . However, if he is to be your lover —perhaps it were convenient to ask him something concerning his respectful designs upon you."

"Yes, sir, I shall do so—if he comes hither again."

So hope, which had fallen a-flickering, expired like a tiny flame. She loved Steve Watts!

I turned and limped up the stairway.

And, at the stair-head, met Nick.

"Well," said I savagely, "you may not have her. For she loves Steve Watts and dotes on his picture in her bosom. And as for you, you may go to the devil!"

"Why, you sorry ass," says he, "have you thought I desired her?"

"Do you not?"

"Good God!" cried he, "because this poor and moon-smitten gentleman hath rolled sheep's eyes upon a yellow-haired maid,

then, in his mind, all the world's aflame to woo her too and take her from his honest arms! What the plague do I want of your sweetheart, Jack Drogue, when I've one at Pigeon Wood and my eye on another, too!"

Then he fell a-laughing and smote his thighs with a loud slapping.

"Aha!" he cried, "did I not warn you? Did I not foresee, foretell, and prophesy that you would one day sicken of a passion for this yellow-haired girl from Caughnawaga!"

"Idiot," said I in a rage, "I do not love her!"

"Then you bear all the earmarks!" said he, and went off stamping his moccasins and roaring with laughter.

And I went on watch to walk my post all a-tremble with fury, and fair sick of jealousy and my first boyish passion.

Now, it is a strange thing how love undid me; but it is still stranger how, of a sudden, my malady passed. And it came about in this way, that toward sunset one day, when I came from walking my post on the veranda roof to find why Nick had not relieved me, I descended the stairs and looked into the kitchen, where was a pleasant smell of cinnamon crullers fresh made and of johnnycake and of meat a-stewing.

And there I did see Nick push Penelope into a corner to kiss her, and saw her fetch him a clout with her open hand.

Then again, and broad on his surprised and silly face, fell her little hand like the clear crack of a drover's whip.

And, "There!" she falters, out o' breath, "there's for you, friend Nicholas!"

"My God!" says he, in foolish amaze, "why do you that, Penelope!"

"I kiss whom I please and none other!" says she, fast breathing, and her dark eyes wide and bright.

"Whom you please," quoth Nick, abashed but putting a bold face on it—"well then, you please me, and therefore ought to kiss me——"

"No, I will not! John Drogue hath shown me what is my privilege in this idle game of bussing which men seem so ready to play with me, whether I will or no! . . . Have I hurt you, Nick?"

She came up to him, still flushed and her childish bosom still rising and falling fast.

"You love Jack Drogue," said he, sulkily, "and therefore belabour me who dote on you."

"I love you both," said she, "but I am enamoured of neither.

Also, I desire no kisses of you or of Mr. Drogue, but only kindness and good will."

"You entertain a passion for Steve Watts!" he muttered sullenly, "and there's the riddle read for you!"

But she laughed in his face and took up her pan of crullers and set them on the shelf.

"I am châtelaine of Summer House," said she, "and need render no account of my inclinations to you or to any man. Who would learn for himself what is in my mind must court me civilly and in good order. . . . Do you desire leave to court me, Nick?"

"Not I!—to be beaten by a besom and flouted and mocked to boot! Nenni, my pretty lass! I have had my mouthful of blows."

"Oh. And your comrade? Is he, do you think, inclined to court me?"

"Jack Drogue?"

"The same."

"You have bedeviled him," said Nick sulkily, "as you have witched all men who encounter you. He hath a fever and is sick of it."

She was slicing hot johnnycake with a knife in the pan; and now looked up at him with eyes full of curiosity.

"Bewitched him? I?"

"Surely. Who else, then?"

"You are jesting, Nick."

"No. Like others he has taken the Caughnawaga fever. The very air you breathe is full of it. But, with a man like my comrade, it is no more than a fever. And it passes, pretty maid!—it passes."

"Does it so?"

"It does. It burns out folly and leaves him the healthier."

"Oh, then—with a gentleman like your comrade, Mr. Drogue—l'amour n'est qu'une maladie legère qui se guerira sans médecin, n'est ce pas?"

"Say that in Canada and doubtless the very dicky-birds will answer wee-wee-wee!" he retorted. "But if you mean, does John Drogue mate below his proper caste, then there's no wee-wee-wee about it; for that the Laird of Northesk will never do!"

"I know that," said she coolly. And opened the pot to fork the steaming stew, then set on the cover and passed her hand over her brow where a slight dew glistened and where her hair curled paler gold and tighter, like a child's.

"Friend Nick?"

"I hear thee, breeder of heart-troubles."

"Listen, then. No thought of me should trouble any man as yet. My heart is not awake—not troublesome,—not engaged,—no, not even to poor Stephen Watts. For the sentiment I entertain for him is only pity for a boy, Nick, who is impetuous and rash and has been too much flattered by the world. . . . Poor lad—in his play-hour regimentals!—and no beard on his smooth cheek. . . . Just a fretful, idle, and self-indulgent boy! . . . Who protests that he loves me. . . . Oh, no, Nick! Men sometimes bewilder me; but I think it is our own passion that destroys us women—not theirs. . . . And there is none in me,—only pity, and a great friendliness to men. . . . And these only have ever moved me."

He was sitting on a pine table and munching of a cruller. "Penelope," says he, "your honesty and wholesome spirit should physic men of their meaner passions. If you are servant to Douw Fonda, nevertheless you think like a great lady. And I for one," he added, munching away, "shall quarrel with any man who makes little of the mistress of Summer House Point!"

And then—oh, Lord!—she turns from her oven, takes his silly head between both hands, and gives him a smack on the lips!

"There," says she, "you have had of your sister what you never should have had of the Scottish lass of Caughnawaga!"

He got off the table at that, looking mighty pleased but sheepish, and muttered something concerning relieving me on post.

And so, lest I should be disgraced by my eavesdropping, and feeling mean and degraded, yet oddly contented that Penelope loved no man with secret passion, I slunk away, my moccasins making no sound.

So when Nick came to relieve me he discovered me still on post; and said he pettishly: "Penelope Grant hath clouted me, mind and body; and I am the better man by it, though somewhat sore; and I shall knock the head of any popinjay who fails in the respect all owe this girl. And I wish to God I had a hickory stick here, and Sir John Johnson across my knee!"

I went into my chamber and laid me down on my trundle bed.

I was contented. I no longer seemed to burn for the girl. Also, I knew she burned for no man. A vast sense of relief spread over me like a soft garment, warming and soothing me.

And so, pleasantly passed my sick passion for the Scottish girl; and pleasantly I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

WINTER AND SPRING

SNOW came as it comes to us in the Northland—a blinding fall, heavy and monotonous—and in forty-eight hours the Johnstown Road was blocked.

Followed a day of dazzling sunshine and intense cold, which set our timbers cracking; and the snow, like finest flour, creaked under our snow-shoes.

All the universe had turned to blue and silver; and the Vlaie Water ran fathomless purple between its unstained snows. But that night the clouds returned and winds grew warmer, and soon the skies opened with feathery white volleys, and the big, thick flakes stormed down again, obliterating alike the work of nature and of man.

Summer House was covered to the veranda eaves. We made shovels and cleared the roofs and broke paths to stable and well.

Here, between dazzling ramparts, we lived and moved and had our being, week after week; and every new snow-storm piled higher our palisades and buried the whole land under one vast white pall.

Vlaie Water froze three feet solid; fierce winds piled the ice with gigantic drifts so that no man could mark the course of the creeks any more; and a vast white desolation stretched away to the mountains, broken only by naked hard-wood forests or by the interminable ocean of the pines weighted deep with snow.

Only when a crust came were we at any pains to set a watch against a war party from the Canadas. But none arrived; no signal smoke stained the peaks; nothing living stirred on that dead white waste save those little grey and whining birds which creep all day up and down tree-trunks, or a sudden gusty flight of snow-birds, which suddenly arrive from nowhere and are gone as suddenly.

Once a white owl with yellow eyes sat upon the ridge-pole of our barn; but our pullets were safe within, and Penelope drove him away with snowballs.

The deer yarded on Maxon; lynx-tracks circled our house and

barn, and we sometimes heard old tassel-ears a-miauling on the Stacking Ridge.

And, toward the end of February, there were two panthers that left huge cat-prints across the drifts on the Johnstown Road; but they took no toll of our sheep, which were safe in a stone fold, though the oaken door to it bore marks of teeth and claws, where the pumas had striven hard to break in and do murder.

Save when a crust formed and we took our turns on guard, my Indian rolled himself in bear-furs by the kitchen oven, and like a bear he slept there until hunger awoke him long enough to gorge for another stretch of sleep.

Nick and I took axes to the woods and drew logs on a sledge to split for fire use. Our tasks, too, kept us busy feeding our live creatures, fetching water, keeping paths open, and fishing through the ice.

In idler intervals we carved devices upon our powder-horns, cured deer-skins in the Oneida fashion, boiled pitch and mended our canoe, fashioned paddles, poles, and shafts for fish-spears, strung snow-shoes, built a fine sledge out of ash and hickory, and made Kaya draw us on the crust.

So, all day, each was busy with tasks and duties, and had little leisure left for that dull restlessness which, in idle people, is the root of all the mischief they devise to do.

Penelope mended our clothing and knitted mittens and jerkins. All house-work and cooking she accomplished, and milked and churned and cared for the pullets. Also, she dipped candles and moulded bullets from the lead bars I found in the gun-room. And when our deer-skins were cured and softened, she made for us soft wallets, sacks, and pouches, and sewed upon them bright beads in the Oneida fashion, from the pack of trade beads in Sir William's gun-room. She sewed upon every accoutrement a design done in scarlet beads, showing a picture of a little red foot.

Lord, but we meant to emerge from our snows in brave fashion, come spring-tide; for now our deer-skin garments were splendid with beads, and our fringes were green and purple. Also, Nick had trapped it some when opportunity offered, setting his line from Summer House along Vlaie Water to Howell's house, thence across the frozen Drowned Lands to the Stacking Ridge, and from there back over the Spring Pool, and thence down-creek to the Sacandaga, where Fish House stood with its glazed windows empty as a blind man's eyes.

He had, by March, a fine pack of peltry; and of these we cured and used sufficient muskrat to sew us blankets, and made a mantle of otter for Penelope and a hood and muff to match.

For ourselves we made us caps out of black mink, and sewed all together by our dip-lights in the red firelight, where apples slowly sizzled with the rich, sweet perfume I love to smell.

Sometimes Nick played upon his fife; and sometimes we all told stories and roasted chestnuts. Nick had more stories and more imagination than had I, and a livelier wit in the telling of tales. But chiefly I was willing to hear Penelope when she told us of her childhood in France, and how folk lived in that warm and sweet country, and what were their daily customs.

Also, she sang sometimes children's songs of France, and other pretty ballads, mostly concerning love. For the French occupy themselves chiefly with love and cooking and the fine arts, I judge, and know how to make an art of eating, also. For there in France every meal is a ceremony; but in this land we eat not for the pleasurable taste which, in savory food, delights and tempts, but we eat swiftly and carelessly and chiefly to stay our hunger.

Yet, at times, food smacks smartly to my tongue; as when at Christmas tide I shot a great wild turkey on the Stacking Ridge; and when Penelope basted it in the kitchen my mouth watered as I sniffed the door-crack.

And again, gone stale with soupaan and jerked meat and fish soused or dried with salt, Nick shot a yearling buck near our barn at daylight; and the savour of his cooking filled all with pleasure.

Upon the New Year we made a feast and had a bottle of Sir William's port, another of Madiera, a punch of spirits, and three pewters of buttery ale.

Lord! there was a New Year. And first, not daring to give drink to my Saguenay, we fed him till he was gorged, and so rolled him in a pile of furs till he slept by the oven below. Then we set twenty dips afire by the chimney, and filled it up with dry logs. . . . I am sorry we had so little sense; for I was something fuddled, and sang ballads—which I can not—and Nick would dance, which he did by himself; and his hornpipes and pigeon-wings and shuffles and war-dances made my head spin and my heavy eyes desire to cross.

Penelope's cheeks burned, and she fanned and fanned her with a turkey wing and laughed to see Nick caper and to hear the piteous squalling which was my way of singing.

But she complained that the dip-lights danced and that the floor behaved in strange fashion, running like ripples on Vlaie Water in a west wind.

She had sipped but one glass of Sir William's port, but I think it was a glass too much; for the wine made her so hot, so she vowed, that her body was all one ardent coal, and so presently she pulled the hair-pegs from her hair and let it down and shook it out in the fire-light till it flashed like a golden scarf flung about her.

Her pannier basque of rose silk—gift of Claudia and made in France—she presently slipped out of, leaving her in her petticoat and folded like a Quakeress in her crossed foulard, and her white arms as bare as her neck.

Which innocently concerned her not a whit, nor had she any more thought of her throat's loveliness than she had of herself in her shift that morning at Bowman's.

She sat cooling her face with the turkey-wing fan and watching Nick's contre-dancing—his own candle-cast shadow on the wall dancing vis-à-vis—and she laughed and laughed, a-fanning there, like a child delighted by the antics of two older brothers, while Nick whirled on moccasined feet in his mad career, and I fifed windily to time his gambolading.

Then we played country games, but she would not kiss us as forfeit, defending her lips and vowing that no man should ever again take that toll of her.

Which contented me, though I remonstrated; and I was glad that Nick should not cheapen her lips though it cost me the same privilege. For we played "Swallow! Swallow!" and I guessed correctly how many apple pips she held in her hand when she sang:

> "Who can count the swallow's eggs?
> Try it, Master Nimble-legs!
> Climb and find a swallow's nest,
> Count the eggs beneath her breast,
> Take an egg and leave the rest
> And kiss the maid you love the best!"

But it was her hand only we might kiss, and but one finger at that—the smallest—for, says she, "John Drogue hath said it, and I am mistress of Summer House! What I choose to give—or forgive—is of my proper choice. . . . And I do not choose to be kissed by any man whether he wears silk puce or deerskin shirt!"

But the devil prompted me to remember Steve Watts, and my countenance changed.

"Do you bar regimentals?" I asked, forcing a wry smile.

She knew what was in my mind, for jealousy grinned at her out of my every feature; and she came toward me and laid her light hand upon my arm.

"Or red coat or blue, my lord," she said, her smile fading to a glimmer, "men have had of me my last complaisance. Are you not content? You taught me, sir."

"If he taught you that a kiss is folly, he taught you more folly than is in a thousand kisses!" cries Nick. "Why," said he, turning on me, "you pitiful, sober-faced, broad-brimmed spoil-sport!" says he, "what are lips made for, you meddlesome ass, and be damned to you!"

Instantly we were in clinch like two bears; and we wrestled and strained and swayed there, panting and nigh stifled with our laughter, till we fell with a crash that shook the house and set the bottles clinking; and there thrashed like a pair o' pups till I got his shoulders flat.

But it was nothing—he being the younger—and he leaped up and fell to treading an Oneida battle-dance, while Penelope and I did beat upon the table, singing:

"Ha-wa-sa-say!
Hah!
Ha-wa-sa-say—"

till the door opened and there stands my Saguenay, bleary-eyed, sleep-muddled, but his benumbed brain responsive to the thumping cadence of the old scalp-song.

But I pushed him down stairs ere he had sniffed a lung-full of our punch, having no mind to face a drink-mad Indian that night or any other.

So I went below and piled the furs upon him and waited till he snored before I left him to his hibernation.

Such childishness! Who would believe it of us that were no longer children! And all alone there in a little house amid a vast and wintry wilderness, where no living thing stirred abroad save the white hare's ghost in the starlight, and the shadow of the lean, weird beast that tracked her.

Well, if we conducted like children we were as light-minded and as innocent. There was in our behaviour no lesser levity; in our mirth no grossness; in our jests and stories no license of the times nor any country coarseness in our speech.

Nor, in me, now remained aught of that sick-heart jealousy or sentimental disorder which lately had seized me and upset my sense and reason.

My sentiments concerning Penelope seemed very clear to me now;—a warm liking; a chivalrous desire for her well-being and happiness; a pride that I had been, in some measure, the instrument which had awakened her to her own prerogatives in a world whose laws are made by men.

And if, on such an occasion as this, she gave us her countenance and even frolicked with us, there was a new and clearer note in her laughter, a swifter confidence in her smile, and, in voice and look and movement, a subtle and shy authority which had not been there in the inexperienced and candid child whose heart seemed bewildered when assaulted, and whose lips, undefended, rendered them to the first marauder.

I said as much, one day, to Nick.

"You've turned the child's head," said he, "with your kingly benefactions. You have but to woo her if you want her to wife."

"Wife!" said I, scared o' the very word. "What the devil shall do with a wife, who am contented as I am? Also, it is not in her mind, nor in mine, who now are pleasant friends and comrades. . . . Also," I added, "love is a disorder and begets a brood of jealousies to plague a man to death! I am calm and contented. I am enamoured of no woman, and do not desire to be so. . . . Although, when I pass thirty, and possess estates, doubtless I shall desire an heir."

"And go a-hunting a mother for this same heir among the giltcats of New York," said Nick. "Which is your destiny, John Drogue, for like seeks like, and a yeoman is born, not made;—and wears his rings in his ears——"

"Have done!" said I impatiently. "I *am* of the soil! I love it! I love plowed land and corn and the smell of stables! I love my log house and my glebe and the smell of English grass!"

"But a servant is a servant, John Drogue, and the mistress of your roof shall have walked in silk before she ever puts on homespun and pattens for love of you! Lord, man! I am I, and you are you! And we mate not with the same breed o' birds. No! For mine shall be a ground-chick of sober hue and feather; and your sweetheart shall have bright wings and own the air for a home.

"That is already written: 'each after its kind.' So God send you your rainbow lady from the clouds, and give you a pretty heir in due event; and as for me, if I guess right, my mate to

be hath never fluttered higher than her garret nor worn a shred of silk till she sews her wedding dress!"

On the last day of March maple sap ran.

Nick and I set out that day to seek a sugar-bush for the new mistress of Summer House.

Snow was soft and our snowshoes scarce bore us, but we floundered along the hard woods, and presently discovered a grove of stately maples.

All that day we were busy in the barn making buckets out o' staves stored there; and on the first day of April we waded the softening snow to the new sugar-bush, tapped the trees, set our spouts and buckets, and also drew thither a kettle and dry wood against future need.

I remember that the day was clear and warm, where, in the sun, the barn doors stood open and the chickens ventured out to scratch about, where the sun had melted the snow.

All day long our cock was a-crowing and a-courting; the south wind came warm with spring and fluttered the wash which Penelope was hanging out to dry and whiten under soft, blue skies.

In pattens she tripped about the slushy yard, her thick, bright hair pegged loosely, and her child's bosom and arms as white as the snow she stepped on.

Save only for my Saguenay, who stood on the veranda roof, resting upon his rifle, the scene was sweet and peaceful. Sheep bleated in yard and fold; cattle lowed in their manger; our cock's full-throated challenge rang out under sunny skies; and everywhere the blue air was murmurous with the voice of rills running from the melting snows like mountain brooks.

On Vlaie Water the ice rotted awash; and already black crows were walking there, and I could see them busily searching the dead and yellow sedge, from where I sat hooping my sap-buckets and softly whistling to myself.

Nick made a snowball and flung it at me, but I dodged it. Then Penelope made another and aimed it at me so truly that the soft lump covered my cap and shoulders with snow.

But her quick peal of laughter was checked when I sprang up to chasten her, and she fled on her pattens, but I caught her around the corner of the house under the lilacs.

"You should be trussed up and trounced like any child," said I, holding her with one hand whilst I scraped out snow from my neck with t'other.

At that she bent and flung a handful of snow over me; and I seized her, bent her back, and scrubbed her face till it was pink.

Choked with snow and laughter, we swayed together, breathless, she still defiant and snatching up snow to fling over me.

"*You* truss *me* up!" she panted. "Do you think you are more than a boy to use me as a father or a husband only has the right?"

"You little minx!" said I, when I had spat out a mouthful of snow, "is not anyone free to trounce a child!——"

At that I slipped, or she tripped me; into a drift I went, and she pounced on me and sat astride with a cry of triumph.

"Now," says she, "I shall take your scalp, my fine friend"; and twisted one hand in my hair.

"Hiu-u! Kou-ee!" she cried, "a scalp taken means war to the end! Do you cry me mercy, John Drogue?"

I struggled, but the snow was soft and I sank the deeper, and could not unseat her.

"I drown in snow," said I. "Get up, you jade!"

"Jade!" cries she, and stopped my mouth with snow.

I struggled in vain; under her clinging weight the soft snow engulfed and held me like a very quicksand. I looked up at her and she laughed down at me.

"Do you yield you, John Drogue?"

"It seems I must. But wait!——"

"You threaten!"

"No! Do you mean to drown me, you vixen!"

"You engage not to seek revenge?"

"I do so."

"Why? Because you love me tenderly?"

"Yes," said I, half choked. "Let me up, you plague of Egypt!"

"That is not a loving speech, John Drogue. Do you love me or no?"

"Yes, I do,—you little,——"

"Little what?"

"Object of my heart's desire!" I fairly yelled. "I am like to smother here!——"

"This is All Fools' Day," says she, sick with laughter to see me mad and at her mercy. "Therefore, you must tell me lies, not truths. Tell me a pretty lie,—quickly!—else I scrub your features!"

After a helpless heave or two I lay still.

"You say you love me tenderly. That is a lie, John Drogue—

it being All Fools' Day. So you shall vow, instead, that you hate me. Come, then!"

"I hate you!" said I, licking the snow from my lips.

"Passionately?"

I looked up at her where deep in the snow, under the lilacs, I lay, my arms spread and her two hands pinning my wrists. She was flushed with laughter and I saw the devils o' mischief watching me deep in her dark eyes.

"It was under these lilacs," said I, "that I had my first hurt of you. You should heal that hurt now."

That confused her, and she blushed and swore to punish me for that fling; but I grinned at her.

"Come," said I, "heal me of my ancient wound as you dealt it me—with your lips!"

"I did not kiss Steve Watts!"

"But he kissed you. So do the like by me and I forgive you all."

"All?"

"Everything."

"Even what I have now done?"

"Even that."

"And you will not truss me up to chasten me when you go free? For it would shame me and I could not endure it."

"I promise."

She looked down at me, smiling, uncertain.

"What will you do to me if I do not?" she asked.

"Drown you in snow three times every day."

"And I needs must kiss you to buy my safety?"

"Yes, and with hearty good will, too."

She glanced hastily around, perhaps to seek an avenue for escape, perhaps to see who might spy us.

Then, looking down at me, a-blush now, yet laughing, she bent her head slowly, very slowly to mine, and rested her lips on mine.

Then she was up and off like a young tree-lynx, fleeing, stumbling on her pattens; but, like a white hare, I lay very still in my form, unstirring, gazing up into the bluest, softest sky that my dazzled eyes ever had unclosed upon.

There was a faint fragrance in the air. It may have been arbutus—or the trace of her lips on mine.

In my ears trilled the pretty melody of a million little snow rills running in the sunshine. I heard the gay cock-crow from the yard, the restless lowing of cattle, the distant caw of a crow flying high over the Drowned Lands.

When at last I got to my feet a strange, new soberness had come over me, stilling exhilaration, quieting the rough and boyish spirits which had possessed me.

Penelope, hanging out linen to sweeten, looked at me over her shoulder, plainly uncertain concerning me. But I kept my word and did not offer to molest her, and so went about my cooper's work again, where Nick also squatted, matching bucket staves, whilst I fell to shaping sap-pans.

It was very still there in the sunshine. And, as I sat there, it seemed to me that I was putting more behind me than the icy and unsullied months of winter,—and that I should never be a boy any more, with a boy's passionless and untroubled soul.

And so came spring upon us in the Northland that fateful year of '77, with blue skies and melting snow and the cock's clarion sounding clear.

But it was mid-April before the first Forest Runner, with pelts, passed through the Sacandaga, twelve days out from Ty, and the woods nigh impassable, he gave account, what with soft drifts choking the hills and all streams over their banks.

And then, for the first, we learned something concerning the great war that was waging everywhere around our outer borders, —how His Excellency had surprised the Hessians at Trenton, and had tricked Cornwallis and beat up the enemy at Princeton. It was amazing to realize that His Excellency, with only the frozen fragments of a meagre and defeated army, had recovered all the Jerseys. But this was so, thank God; and we wondered to hear of it.

All this the Forest Runner told us as he ate and drank in the kitchen,—and how Lord Stirling had been made a major-general, and that we had now enlisted four fine regiments of horse to curb DeLancy's bold riders; and how that great Tory, John Penn, who was lately Governor of Pennsylvania, Thomas Wharton, and Benjamin Chew, had been packed off with other villains as prisoners into Virginia. Which pleased me, because of all that Quaker treachery in the proprietary; and I deemed them mean and selfish and self-righteous dogs who whined all day of peace and brotherhood and non-resistance, and did conduct most cruelly by night for greed and sordid gain.

Not that I liked the New Englanders the better; but, of the two, preferred them and had rather they settled the Pennsylvania wilds than that the sly, smug proprietaries multiplied there and nursed treason at the breast.

Well, our Coureur-du-Bois, in his greasy leather, quills, and scarlet braid, had other news for us less palatable.

For it seemed that we had lost two thousand men and all their artillery when Fort Washington fell; that we had lost a hundred more men and eleven vessels to Sir Guy Carleton on Lake Champlain; that the garrison at Ty was a slim one and sick for the most, and the relief regiments were so slow in filling that three New England states were drafting their soldiery by force.

There were rumours rife concerning the summer campaign, and how the British had a plan to behead our new United States by lopping off all New England.

It was to be done in this manner: Guy Carleton's army was to come down from the North through the lakes, driving Gates, descend the Hudson to Albany and there join Clinton and his British, who were to force the Highlands, march up the river, and so hold all the Hudson, which would cut the head—New England—from the body of the new nation.

And to make this more certain, there was now gathering in the West an army under Butler and Brant, to strike the Mohawk Valley, sweep through it to Schenectady, and there come in touch with Burgoyne.

To oppose this terrible invasion from three directions we had forts on the Hudson and a few troops; but His Excellency was engaged south of these points and must remain there.

We had, at Ty, a skeleton army, and Gates to lead it, with which to face Burgoyne. We had, in the Mohawk Valley, to block the west and show a bold front to Brant and Butler, only fragments of Van Schaik's and Livingston's Continental line, now digging breastworks at Stanwix, a company at Johnstown, and at a crisis, our Tryon County militia, now drilling under Herkimer.

And, save for a handful of Rangers and Oneidas, these were all we had in Tryon to resist the hordes that were gathering to march on us from north, west and south,—British regulars with horse, foot, and magnificent artillery; partizans and loyalists numbering 1200; a thousand savages in their paint; Highlanders, Canadians, Hessians; Sir John Johnson's regiment of Royal Greens; Colonel John Butler's regiment of Rangers; McDonald's renegades and painted Tories—God! what a murderous horde; and all to make their common tryst here in County Tryon!

Our grim, lank Forest Runner sprawled on the settle by the kitchen table, smoking his bitter Indian tobacco and drinking

rum and water, well sugared; and Penelope and Nick and I sat around him to listen, and look gravely at one another as we learned more and more of what it seemed that Fate had in storage for us.

The hot spiced rum loosened the Runner's tongue. His name was Dick Jessup; and he was a hard, grim man whose business, from youth—which was peltry—had led him through perilous ways.

He told us of wild and horrid doings, where solitary settlers and lone trappers had been murdered by Guy Carleton's outlying Iroquois, from Quebec to Crown Point.

Scores and scores of scalps had been taken; wretched prisoners had suffered at the Iroquois stake under tortures indescribable—the mere mention of which made Penelope turn sickly white and set Nick gnawing his knuckles.

But what most infuriated me was the thought that in the regiments of old John Butler and Sir John Johnson were scores of my old neighbors who now boasted that they were coming back to cut our throats on our own thresholds,—coming back with a thousand savages to murder women and children and ravage all with fire so that only a blackened desert should remain of the valleys and the humble homes we had made and loved.

Jessup said, puffing the acrid willow smoke from his clay: "Where I lay hidden near Oneida Lake, I saw a Seneca war party pass on the crust; and they had fresh scalps which dripped on the snow.

"And, near Niagara, I saw Butler's Rangers manœuvring on snowshoes, with drums and curly bugle-horns."

"Did you know any among them?" I asked sombrely.

"Why, yes. There was Michael Reed, kin to Henry Stoner."

"My cousin, damn him!" quoth Nick, calmly.

"He was a drummer in the Rangers of John Butler," nodded Jessup. "And I saw Philip Helmer there in a green uniform, and Charles Cady, too, of Fonda's Bush."

"All I ask," says Nick, "is to get these two hands on them. I demand no weapons; I want only to feel my fingers closing on them." He sat staring into space with the blank glare of a panther. Then, "Were they painted?" he demanded.

"No," said Jessup, "but Simon Girty was and Newberry, too. There were a dozen painted Tories or blue-eyed Indians,—whatever you call 'em,—and they sat at a Seneca fire where the red post stood, and all eating half-raw venison, guts and all——"

Penelope averted her pallid face and leaned her head on her hand.

Jessup took no notice: "They burned a prisoner that day. I was sick, where I lay hidden, to hear his shrieks. And the British in their cantonments could hear as plainly as I, yet nobody interfered."

"There could have been no British officer there," said Penelope, in the ghost of a voice.

"Well, there were, then," said Jessup bluntly. Turning to me he added: "There's a gin'rall there at Niagara, called St. Leger, and he's a drunken son of a slut! We should not be afeard of that puffed up bladder, and I hope he comes against us. But Butler has some smart officers, like his son Walter, and Lieutenant Hare, and young Stephen Watts——"

"You saw *him* there!" exclaimed Penelope.

"Yes, I saw him in a green uniform; and, with him also, a-horse, rode Sir John Johnson, all in red, and Walter Butler in black and green, and his long cloak a-trail to his spurs. By God, there is a motley crew for you—what with Brant in the saddle, in paint and buckskins and fur robe, and shaved like any dirty Mohawk; and Hiakatoo, like a blackened devil out o' hell, all barred with scarlet and wearing the head of a great wolf for a cap, as well as the pelt to cover his war-paint!—and McDonald, with his kilt and dirk, and the damned black eyes of him and the two buck-teeth shining on his lips!—God!" he breathed; and took a long pull at his pannikin of spiced rum.

That evening Jessup left for Johnstown on his way to Albany with his peltry; and took with him a letter which I wrote to the Commandant at Johnstown fort.

But it was past the first of May before I had any notice taken of my letter; and on a Sunday came an Oneida runner, bearing two letters for me; one from the Commandant, acquainting me that it was not his intention to garrison Fish House or Summer House, that Nick and I were sufficient to stand watch on the Mohawk Trail and Drowned Lands and report any movement threatening the Valley from the North, and that what few men he had must go to Stanwix, where the fort had not yet been completed.

The other letter was writ me from Fonda's Bush by honest John Putman:

"Friend Jack" (says he), "this Bush is a desert indeed and all run off,—the Tories to Canady,—such as the Helmers, Cadys,

Bowmans, Reeds, and the likes,—save Adam Helmer, who is of our complexion,—and our own people who are friends to liberty have fled to Johnstown excepting me,—all the women and children,—Jean De Silver's family, De Luysnes' people, the Salisburys, Scotts, Barbara Stoner, who married Conrad Reed and has gone to New York now; and all the Putmans save myself, who shall go presently in fear of the savages and Sir John.

"Sir, it is sad to see our housen empty and our fields fallow, and weeds growing in plowed land. There remain no longer any cattle or fowls or any beasts at all, only the wild poultry of the woods come to the deserted doorsteps, and the red fox runs along the fence.

"Your house stands empty as it was when you marched away. Only squirrels inhabit it now, and porcupines gnaw the corn-crib.

"Well, friend Jack, this is all I have to say. I shall drive my oxen to Johnstown Fort tomorrow, and give this letter to the first runner or express.

"I learn that you have bought the Summer House of the Commission. I wish you joy of it, but it seems a perilous purchase, and I fear that you shall soon be obliged to leave it.

"So, wishing you health, and beholden to you for many kindnesses—as are we all who come from Fonda's Bush—I close, sir, with respect and my obedience and duty to my brave young friend who serves liberty that we old folk and our women and children shall not perish or survive as British slaves.

"Sir, awaiting the dread onset of Sir John with that firmness which becomes a good American, I am,

"Your obliged and humble servant,

"JOHN PUTMAN."

The Oneida left in an hour for Ty.

And it was, I think, an hour later when Nick comes a-running to find me.

"A fire at Fish House," he cries, "and a dense smoke mounting to the sky!"

I flung aside my letter, ran to the kitchen, and called Penelope.

"Pack up and be ready to leave!" said I. And, to Nick: "Saddle Kaya and be ready to take Penelope a-horse to Mayfield blockhouse. Call my Indian!"

As I belted my shirt and stood ready, my Saguenay came swiftly, trailing his rifle.

"Come," said I, "we must learn why that smoke towers yonder to the sky."

Penelope took me by the sleeve:

"Do nothing rash, John Drogue," she said in a breathless way.

"Get you ready for flight," said I, fixing a fresh flint. "Nick shall run at your stirrup if it comes to that pinch——"

"But *you!*"

"Why, I am well enough; and if the Iroquois are at Fish House then I retreat through Varrick's, and so by Fonda's Bush to Mayfield Fort."

She clasped her hands.

"I do not wish to leave Summer House," she said pitifully. "What is to happen to our sheep and cattle—and to our fowls and all our stores—and to Summer House itself?"

"God knows," said I impatiently. "Why do you stand there idle when you must make ready for flight!"

"I—I can not bear to have you go to Fish House—all alone——"

"I have the Yellow Leaf, and can keep clear o' trouble. Come, Penelope!——"

"When you move toward trouble I do not desire to flee the other way, toward safety!——"

"Pack up, Penelope!" shouted Nick, leading Kaya into the orchard, all saddled; and fell to making up his pack on the grass.

"At Mayfield Fort!" I called across to Nick. "And if I be not there by night, then take Penelope to Johnstown, for it means that the Iroquois are on the Sacandaga!"

"I mark you, Jack!" he replied. I turned to the girl:

"Farewell, Penelope," I said. "You shall be safe with Nick."

"But you, John Drogue?"

"Safe in the forest, always, and the devil himself could not catch me," said I cheerily.

She stretched out her hand. I took it, looked at her, then kissed her fingers. And so went away swiftly, to where our canoe lay, troubled because of this young girl whom I had no desire to fall truly in love with, and yet knew I had been near to it many times that spring.

I got into the canoe and took the stern paddle; my Saguenay kneeled down in the bow; and we shot out across the Vlaie Water.

Once I turned and looked back over my shoulder; and I saw Penelope standing there on the grass, and Nick awaiting her with Kaya.

But I did not wish to feel as I felt at that moment. I did not desire to fall in love. No!

"Au large!" I said to my Indian, and swept the birchen craft out into the deep and steady current.

CHAPTER XXIV

GREEN-COATS

NOTHING stirred on the Drowned Lands as we drove our canoe at top speed between tall bronzed stalks of rushes and dead water-weeds. Vlaie Water was intensely blue and patched with golden débris of floating stuff—shreds of cranberry vine, rotting lily pads, and the like—and in twenty minutes we floated silently into the Spring Pool, opposite the Stacking Ridge, where hard earth bordered both shores and where maples and willows were now in lusty bud.

Two miles away, against Maxon's sturdy bastion, a vast quantity of smoke was writhing upward in dark and cloudy convolutions. I could not see Fish House—that oblong, unpainted building a story and a half in height, with its chimneys of stone and the painted fish weather vane swimming in the sky. But I was convinced that it was afire.

We beached our canoe and drew it under the shore-reeds, and so passed rapidly down the right bank of the stream along the quick water, holding our guns cocked and primed, like hunters ready for a hazard shot at sight.

There was no snow left; all frost was out of the ground along the Drowned Lands; and the earth was sopping wet. Everywhere frail green spears of new grass pricked the dead and matted herbage; and in sheltered places tiny green leaves embroidered stems and twigs; and I saw wind-flowers, and violets both yellow and blue, and the amber shoots of skunk cabbage growing thickly in wet places. The shadbush, too, was in exquisite white bloom along the stream, and I remember that I saw one tree in full flower, and a dozen bluejays sitting amid the snowy blossoms like so many lumps of sapphire.

Now, on the mainland, a clearing showed in the sunshine; and beyond it I saw a rail fence bounding a field still black and wet from last autumn's plowing.

We took to the brush and bore to the right, where on firm ground a grove of ash and butternut forested the ridge, and a sandy path ran through.

I knew this path. Sir William often used it when hunting, and his cows, kept at Fish House when his two daughters lived there, travelled this way to and from pasture.

Between us and the Sacandaga lay one of those grassy gulleys where, in time of flood, back-water from the Sacandaga spread deep.

My Indian and I now lay down and drew our bodies very stealthily toward the woods' edge, where the setback from the river divided us from Fish House.

Ahead of us, through the trees, dense volumes of smoke crowded upward and unfolded into strange, cloudy shapes, and we could hear a loud and steady crackling noise made by feeding flames.

Presently, through the trees, I saw Fish House all afire, and now only a glowing skeleton in the sunshine. But the dense smoke came not now from Fish House, but from three barracks of marsh-hay burning, which vomited thick smoke into the sky. Near the house some tall piles of hewn logs were blazing, also a corn-crib, a small barn, and a log farmhouse, where I think that damned rascal, Wormwood, once lived. And it had been bought by a tenant of Sir William,—one of the patriot Shews or Helmers, if I mistake not, who was given favourable advantages to undertake such a settlement, but now had fled to Johnstown.

Godfrey Shew's own house, just over the knoll to the eastward, was also on fire: I could see the flames from it and a thin brownish smoke which belched out black cinders and shreds of charred bark.

I did not see a living creature near these fires, but farther toward the east clearing I heard voices and the sound of picks and axes; and my Saguenay and I crept thither along the bank of the flooded hollow.

Very soon I perceived the new earthwork and log-stockade made the previous summer by our Continentals; and there, to my astonishment, I saw a motley company of white men and Indians, who were chopping down the timbers of the palisades, levelling the earthwork with pick and shovel.

So near were they across the flooded hollow that I recognized Elias Beacraft, brother to Benjy, who had gone off with McDonald. Also, I saw and knew Captain James Hare, brother to Lieutenant Henry Hare, of Butler's regiment; and Henry, also, was there; and Captain Nellis, of the forester service. Both the Hares and Nellis were dressed in green uniforms, and there were two other green-coats whom I knew not, but all busy with their work of destruction, and their axes flashing in the sunshine.

The others I had, of course, taken for very savages, for they were feathered and painted and wore Indian dress; but when one of these came down to the flooded hollow to fill his tin cup and drink, to my horror I saw that the eyes in that hideously-painted face were a *light blue!*

"Nai! Yengese!" whispered the Yellow Leaf.

The painted Tory was not ten yards from where we lay, and, as I gazed intently at those hideously daubed features, all at once I knew the man.

For this horrid and grotesque figure, all besmeared with ochre and indigo, and wearing Indian dress, was none other than an old neighbour of mine in Tryon County, one George Cuck, who lived near Jan Zuyler and his two buxom daughters, and who had gone off with Sir John last May.

As I stared at him in ever-rising astonishment and rage, comes another *blue-eyed Indian*—Barney Cane,—wearing Iroquois paint and feathers, and all gaudy in his beaded war-dress. And, at his belt, I saw a fresh scalp hanging by its hair,—*the light brown hair of a white man!*

I could hear Cane speaking with Cuck in English. Beacraft came down to the water; and Billy Newberry* and Hare* also came down, both wearing the uniform of the forester service. And I was astounded to see Henry Hare back again after his narrow escape at Summer House last autumn, the night I got my hurt.

But he wore no Valley militia disguise now; all these men were in green-coats, openly flaunting the enemy uniform in County Tryon,—save only those painted beasts Cuck and Cane.

It was a war party, and it had accomplished a clean job at Fish House; and now they all were coming down to the flooded hollow and looking across it where lay the short route west to Summer House.

Presently I heard a great splashing to our left, and saw a skiff and two green-coats and two Mohawk Indians in it pulling across the back-water.

And these latter were real Mohawks, stripped, oiled, their heads shaved, and in their battle-paint, who squatted there in the skiff, scanning with glowing eyes the bank where my Saguenay and I lay concealed.

* This same man, William Newberry, a sergeant in Butler's regiment; and Henry Hare, lieutenant in the same regiment, were caught inside the American lines, court-martialed, convicted of unspeakable cruelties, and were hung as spies by order of General Clinton, July 6th, 1779.

It was perfectly plain, now, what they meant to do. Beacraft, Cane, and Cuck went back to the ruined redoubt, and presently returned loaded with packs. Baggage and rifles were laid in the skiff.

I touched Yellow Leaf on the arm, and we wriggled backward out of sight. Then, rising, we turned and pulled foot for our canoe.

Now my chiefest anxiety was whether Penelope and Nick had got clean away and were already well on the road to the Mayfield Block House.

We found our canoe where we had hid it, and we made the still water boil with our two paddles, so that, although it seemed an age to me, we came very swiftly to our landing at Summer House Point.

Here we sprang out, seized the canoe, ran with it up the grassy slope, then continued over the uncut lawn and down the western slope, where again we launched it and let it swing on the water, held anchored by its nose on shore.

House, barn, orchard, all were deathly still there in the brilliant sunshine; I ran to the manger and found it empty of cattle. There were no fowls to be seen or heard, either. Then I hastened to the sheep-fold. That, also, was empty.

Perplexed, I ran down to the gates, found them open, and, in the mud of the Johnstown Road, discovered sheep and cattle tracks, the imprint of Kaya's sharp-shod hoofs, a waggon mark, and the plain imprint of Nick's moccasins.

So it was clear enough what he and Penelope had done. A terrible anxiety seized me, and I wondered how far they had got on the way to Mayfield, with cattle and sheep to drive ahead of a loaded waggon and one horse.

And now, more than ever, it was certain that my Indian and I must make a desperate stand here to hold back these marauders until our people were safe in Mayfield without a shadow of doubt.

The Saguenay had gone to the veranda roof with his rifle, where he could see any movement by land or water.

I called up to him that the destructives might come by both routes; then I went to my room, gathered all the lead bars and bags of bullets, seized our powder keg, and dragged all down to the water, where I stored everything in the canoe.

That was all I could take, save a sack of ground corn mixed with maple sugar, a flask of rum, and a bag of dry meat.

These articles, with our fur robes and blankets, a fish-spear,

and a spontoon which I discovered, were all I dared attempt to save.

I stood in the pretty house, gazing desperately about me, sad to leave this place to flames, furious to realize that this little lodge must perish, which once was endeared to me because Sir William loved it, and now had become doubly dear because I had given it to a young girl whom I loved—and tenderly—yet desired not to become enamoured with.

Sunshine fell through the glazed windows, where chintz curtains stirred in the wind.

I looked around at the Windsor chairs, the table where we had supped together so often. I went into Penelope's room and looked at her maple bed, so white and fresh.

There was a skein of wool yarn on the table. I took it; gazed at it with new and strange emotions a-fiddling at my throat and twitching eyes and lips; and placed it in the breast of my hunting shirt.

Then I listened; but my Indian overhead remained silent. So I went on through the house, and then down to the kitchen, where I saw all sweetly in order, and pan and china bright; and soupaan still simmering where Penelope had left it.

There was a bowl of milk there, and the cream thick on it. And she had set a dozen red apples handy, with flour and spices and a crock of lard for to fashion a pie, I think.

Slowly I went up stairs and then out the kitchen door, across the grass. The Saguenay saw me from above and made a sign that all was still quiet on the Drowned Lands.

So I went to the manger again, and thence to the barn and around the house.

The lilacs had bursted their buds, and I could see tiny bunches pushing out on every naked stem where the fragrant, grape-like bunches of bloom should hang in May.

Then I looked down, and remembered where I had lain in the snow under these same lilacs, and how there Penelope had bullied me and then consented to kiss me on the mouth. . . . And, as I was thinking sadly of these things,—bang! went my Indian's rifle from the veranda roof.

I sprang out upon the west lawn and saw the powder cloud drifting over the house, and my Indian, sheltered by the roof, reloading his piece on one knee.

"By water!" he called out softly, when he saw me.

At that I ran into the house by the front door, which faced south; closed and bolted the four heavy green shutters in the

two rooms on the ground floor, barred the south door and the west, or kitchen door below; and sprang up the ladder to the low loft chamber, from whence, stooping, I crept out of the south-gable window upon the veranda.

This piazza promenade was nearly as high as the eaves. The gable ends of the roof, in which were windows, faced north and south, but the promenade ran all around the east end and sides, which, supported by columns, afforded a fine rifle-platform for defense against a water attack, and gave us a wide view out over the mysterious Drowned Lands.

It was a vast panorama that lay around us—a great misty amphitheatre more than a hundred miles in circumference. At our feet lay that immense marsh of fifteen thousand acres, called the Great Vlaie; mountains walled the Drowned Lands north, east, west; and to the south stretched a wilderness of pine and spectral tamaracks.

Lying flat on the roof, and peering cautiously between the spindles of the railing, I saw, below on the Vlaie Water, the same skiff I had seen at Fish House.

In the heavy skiff, the gunwales of which were barricaded with their military packs, lay six green-coats,—Captains Hare and Nellis, Sergeant Newberry, Beacraft, and two strangers in private's uniform.

They had a white flag set in the prow.

But the two blue-eyed Indians, Barney Cane and George Cuck, were not with them, nor were the two Mohawks. And in a whisper I bade my Saguenay go around to the south gable and keep his eye on the gate and the Johnstown Road on the mainland.

Hare took the white flag from the prow and waved it, the two rowers continuing up creek and heading toward our landing.

Then I called out to them to halt and back water; and, as they paid no heed, I fired at their white flag, and knocked the staff and rag out of Hare's hand without wounding him.

At that two or three cried out angrily, but their rowers ceased and began to back water hastily; and I, reloading, kept an eye on them.

Then Hare stood up in the skiff and bawled through his hollowed hand:

"Will you parley? Or do you wish to violate a flag?"

"Keep your interval, Henry Hare!" I retorted. "If you have anything to say, say it from where you are or I'll drill you clean!"

"Is that John Drogue, the Brent-Meester?" he shouted.

"None other," said I. "What brings you to Summer House in such fair weather, Harry Hare?"

"I wish to land and parley," he replied. "You may blindfold me if you like."

"When I put out your lights," said I, "it will be a quicker job than that. What do you wish to do—count our garrison?"

Captain Nellis got up from his seat and replied that he knew how many people occupied Summer House, and that, desiring to prevent the useless effusion of blood, he demanded our surrender under promise of kind treatment.

I laughed at him. "No," said I, "my hair suits my head and I like it there rather than swinging all red and wet at the girdle of your blue-eyed Indians."

As I spoke I saw Newberry and Beacraft bring the butts of their rifles to their shoulders, and I shrank aside as their pieces cracked out sharply across the water.

Splinters flew from the painted column on the corner of the house; the green-coats all fell flat in their skiff and lay snug there, hidden by their packs.

Presently, as I watched, I saw an oar poked out.

Very cautiously somebody was sculling the skiff down stream and across in the direction of the reeds.

As the craft turned to enter the marsh, I had a fleeting view of the sculler—only his head and arm—and saw it was Eli Beacraft.

I was perfectly cool when I fired on him. He let go his oar and fell flat on the bottom of the boat. The echo of my shot died away in wavering cadences among the shoreward woods; an intense stillness possessed the place.

Then, of a sudden, Beacraft fell to kicking his legs and screeching, and so flopped about in the bottom of the boat, like a stranded fish all over blood.

The boat nosed in betwen the marsh-grasses and tall sledge, and I could not see it clearly any more.

But the green-coats in it were no sooner hid than they began firing at Summer House, and the storm of lead ripped and splintered the gallery and eaves, tore off shingles, shattered chimney bricks, and rang out loud on the iron hinges of door and shutter.

I fired a few shots into their rifle-smoke, then lay watching and waiting, and listening ever for the loud explosion of my Indian's piece, which would mean that the painted Tories and the Mohawks were stealing upon us from the mainland.

Every twenty minutes or so the men in the batteau-skiff let

off a rifle shot at Summer House, and the powder-cloud rising among the dead weeds, pinxters, and button-ball bushes, discovered the location of their craft.

Sometimes, as I say, I took a shot at the smoke; but time was the essence of my contract, and God knows it contented me to stand siege whilst Penelope and Nick, with waggon and cattle, were plodding westward toward Mayfield.

About four o'clock in the afternoon I was hungry and went to get me a piece in the pantry.

Then I took Yellow Leaf's place whilst he descended to appease his hunger.

We ate our bread and meat together on the roof, our rifles lying cocked across our knees.

"Brother," said I, munching away, "if, indeed, you be, as they say, a tree-eater, and live on bark and buds when there is no game to kill, then I think your stomach suffers nothing by such diet, for I want no better comrade in a pinch, and shall always be ready to bear witness to your bravery and fidelity."

He continued to eat in silence, scraping away at his hot soupaan with a pewter spoon. After he had licked both spoon and pannikin as clean as a cat licks a saucer, he pulled a piece of jerked deer meat in two and gravely chewed the morsel, his small, brilliant eyes ever roving from the water to the mainland.

Presently, without looking at me, he said quietly:

"When I was only a poor hunter of the Montagnais, I said to myself, 'I am a man, yet hardly one.' * I learned that a Saguenay was a real man when my brother told me.

"My brother cleared my eyes and wiped away the ancient mist of tears. I looked; and lo! I found that I was a real man. I was made like other men and not like a beast to be kicked at and stoned and driven with sticks flung at me in the forest."

"The Yellow Leaf is a warrior," I said. "The Oneida Anowara † bear witness to scalps taken in battle by the Yellow Leaf. Tahioni, the Wolf, took no more."

"Ni-ha-ron-ta-kowa," ‡ said the Saguenay proudly, "onkwe honwe! § Yet it was my *white* brother who cleared my eyes of mist. Therefore, let him give me a new name—a warrior's name—meaning that my vision is now clear."

* Kon-kwe-ha. Literally, "I am a little of a real man."
† "Tortoise," or Noble Clan.
‡ He is an Oneida.
§ "A real man," in Canienga dialect. The Saguenay's Iroquois is mixed and imperfect.

"Very well," said I, "your war name shall be Sak-yen-haton!" *—which was as good Iroquois as I could pronounce, and good enough for the Montagnais to comprehend, it seemed, for a gleam shot from his eyes, and I heard him say to himself in a low voice: "Haiah-ya! I am a real warrior now! . . . Onenh! at last!"

A shot came from the water; he looked around contemptuously and smiled.

"My elder brother," said he, "shall we two strip and set our knives between our teeth, and swim out to scalp those musk-rats yonder?"

"And if they fire at us in the water?" said I, amused at his mad courage, who had once been "hardly a man."

"Then we dive like Tchurako, the mink, and swim beneath the water, as swims old 'long face' the great wolf-pike! † Shall we rush upon them thus, O my elder brother?"

Absurd as it was, the wild idea began to inflame me, and I was seriously considering our chances at twilight to accomplish such a business, when, of a sudden, I saw on the mainland an officer of the Indian Department, who bore a white rag on the point of his hanger and waved it toward the house.

He came across the Johnstown Road to our gate, but made no motion to open it, and stood there slowly waving his white flag and waiting to be noticed and hailed.

"Keep your rifle on that man," I whispered to my Indian, "for I shall go down to the orchard and learn what are the true intentions of these green-coats and blue-eyed Indians. Find a rest for your piece, hold steadily, and kill that flag if I am fired on."

I saw him stretch out flat on his belly and rest his rifle on the veranda rail. Then I crawled into the garret, descended through the darkened house, and, unbolting the door, went out and down across the grass to the orchard.

"What is your errand?" I called out, "you flag there outside our gate?"

"Is that you, John Drogue?" came a familiar voice.

I took a long look at him from behind my apple tree, and saw it was Jock Campbell, one of Sir John's Highland brood and late a subaltern in the Royal Provincials.

And that he should come here in a green coat with these murderous vagabonds incensed me.

* "Disappearing Mist"—Sakayen-gwaration.

† Che-go-sis—pickerel. In the Oneida dialect, Ska-ka-lux or *Bad-eye*.

"What do you want, Jock Campbell!" I demanded, controlling my temper.

"I want a word with you under a flag!"

"Say what you have to say, but keep outside that gate!" I retorted.

"John Drogue," says he, "we came here to burn Summer House, and mean to do it. We know how many you have to defend the place——"

"Oh, do you know that? Then tell me, Jock, if you truly possess the information."

"Very well," said he calmly. "You are two white men, a Montagnais dog, and a girl. And pray tell me, sir, how long do you think you can hold us off?"

"Well," said I, "if you are as thrifty with your skins as you have been all day, then we should keep this place a week or two against you."

"What folly!" he exclaimed hotly. "Do you think to prevail against us?"

"Why, I don't know, Jock. Ask Beacraft yonder, who hath a bullet in his belly. He's wiser than he was and should offer you good counsel."

"I offer you safe conduct if you march out at once!" he shouted.

"I offer you one of Beacraft's pills if you do not instantly about face and march into the bush yonder!" I replied.

At that he dashed the flag upon the road and shook his naked sword at me.

"Your blood be on your heads!" he bawled. "I can not hold my Indians if you defy them longer!"

"Well, then, Jock," said I, "I'll hold 'em for you, never fear!"

He strode to the fence and grasped it.

"Will you march out? Shame on you, Stormont, who are seduced by this Yankee rabble o' rebels when your place is with Sir John and with the loyal gentlemen of Tryon!

"For the last time, then, will you parley and march out? Or shall I give you and your Caughnawaga wench to my Indians?"

I walked out from behind my tree and drew near the fence, where he was standing, his sword hanging from one wrist by the leather knot.

"Jock Campbell," said I, "you are a great villain. Do you lay aside your hanger and your pistols, and I will set my rifle here, and we shall soon see what your bragging words are worth."

At that he drove his sword into the earth, but, as I set my rifle

against a tree, he lifted his pistol and fired at me, and I felt the wind of the bullet on my right cheek.

Then he snatched his sword and was already vaulting the gate, when my Saguenay's bullet caught him in mid-air, and he fell across the top rail and slid down on the muddy road outside.

Then, for the first time, I saw the two real Mohawks where they lay in ambush in the bush. One of them had risen to a kneeling position, and I saw the red flash of his piece and saw the smoke blot out the tree-trunk.

For a second I held my fire; then saw them both on the ground under the alders across the road, and fired very carefully at the nearest one.

He dropped his gun and let out a startling screech, tried to get up off the ground, screeching all the while; then lay scrabbling on the dead leaves.

I stepped behind an apple tree, primed and reloaded in desperate haste, and presently drew the fire of the other Indian with my cap on my ramrod.

Then, as I ran to the gate, my Saguenay rushed by me, leaping the fence at a great bound, and I saw his up-flung hatchet sparkle, and heard it crash through bone.

I shouted for him to come back, but when he obeyed he had two Mohawk scalps,* and came reluctantly, glancing down at Campbell where he lay still breathing on the muddy road, and darting an uncertain glance at me.

But I told him with an oath that it would be an insult to me if he touched a white man's hair in my presence; and he opened the gate and came inside like a great, sullen dog from whom I had snatched a bone of his own digging.

Very cautiously we retreated through the orchard to the house, entered, and climbed again to the roof.

And from there we saw that, in our absence, the boat had been rowed to our landing, and that its occupants were now somewhere on the mainland, doubtless preparing to assault the place as soon as dusk offered them sufficient cover.

Well, the game was nearly up now. Our people should have arrived by this time at Mayfield with sheep, cattle, and waggon. We had remained here to the limit of safety, and there was no

* In October, 1919, the author talked to a farmer and his son, who, a few days previously, while digging sand to mend the Johnstown road at this point, had disinterred two skeletons which had been buried there. From the shape of the skulls, it is presumed that the remains were Indian.

hope of aid in time to save our skins or this house from destruction.

The sun was low over the forest when, at length, we crept out of the house and stole down to our canoe.

We made no sound when we embarked, and our craft glided away under the rushes, driven by cautiously-dipped paddles which left only silent little swirls on the dark and glassy stream.

Up Mayfield Creek we turned, which, above, is not fair canoe-water save at flood; but now the spring melting filled it brim-full, and a heavy current set into Vlaie Water so that there was labour ahead for us; and we bent to it as dusk fell over the Drowned Lands.

It was not yet full dark when, over my shoulder, I saw a faint rose light in the north. And I knew that Summer House was on fire.

Then, swiftly the rosy light grew to a red glow, and, as we watched, a great conflagration flared in the darkness, mounting higher, burning redder, fiercer, till, around us, vague smouldering shadows moved, and the water was touched with ashy glimmerings.

Summer House was all afire, and the infernal light touched us even here, painting our features and the paddle-blades, and staining the dark water with a prophecy of blood.

It was a long and irksome paddle, what with floating trees we encountered and the stream over its banks and washing us into sedge and brush and rafts of weed in the darkness. Again and again, checked by some high dam of drifted windfall, we were forced to make a swampy carry, waist high through bog and water.

Often, so, we were forced to rest; and we sat silent, panting, skin-soaked in the chilly night air, gazing at the distant fire, which, though now miles away, seemed so near. And I could even see trees black against the blaze, and smoke rolling turbulently, and a great whirl of sparks mounting skyward.

It was long past midnight when I hailed the picket at the grist-mill and drove our canoe shoreward into the light of a lifted lantern.

"Is Nick Stoner in?" I called out.

"All safe!" replied somebody on shore.

A dark figure came down to the water and took hold of our bow to steady us.

"Summer House and Fish House are burned," said I, climbing out stiffly.

"Aye," said the soldier, "and what of Fonda's Bush, Mr. Drogue?"

"What!" I exclaimed, startled.

"Look yonder," said he.

I scarce know how I managed to stumble up the bushy bank. And then, when I came out on level land near the block house, I saw fire to the southeast, and the sky crimson above the forest.

"My God!" I stammered, "Fonda's Bush is all afire!"

There was a red light toward Frenchman's Creek, too, but where Fonda's Bush should lie a vast sea of fire rose and ebbed and waxed and faded above the forest.

"Were any people left there?" I asked.

"None, sir."

"Thank God," I said. But my heart was desolate, for now my house of logs that I had builded and loved was gone; my glebe destroyed; all my toil come to naught in the distant mockery of those shaking flames. All I had in the world was gone save for my slender funds in Albany.

"Where are my friends?" said I to a soldier.

"At the Block House, sir, and very anxious concerning you. They have not long been in, but Nick Stoner is all for going back to Summer House to discover your whereabouts, and has been beating up recruits for a flying scout."

Even as he spoke, I saw Nick come up the road with a torch, and called out to him.

"Where have you been, John Drogue?" said he, coming to me and laying a hand on my shoulder.

"Is Penelope safe?" I asked.

"She is as safe as are any here in Mayfield. Is it Summer House that burns in the north, or only the marsh hay?"

"The whole place is afire," said I. "A dozen green-coats, blue-eyed Indians, and two real ones, burnt Fish House and attacked us at Summer House. I saw and knew Jock Campbell, Henry Hare, Billy Newberry, Barney Cane, Eli Beacraft, and George Cuck. My Saguenay mortally wounded Jock. He's lying on the road. He tomahawked a Canienga, too, and took his scalp and another's."

"Did *you* mark any of the dirty crew?" demanded Nick.

"I shot Beacraft and one Mohawk. How many are we at the Block House?"

"A full company to hold it safe," said he, gloomily. "Do you know that Fonda's Bush is burning?"

"Yes."

After a silence I said: "Who commands here? I think we ought to move toward Johnstown this night. I don't know how many green-coats have come to the Sacandaga, but it must have been another detachment that is burning Fonda's Bush."

As I spoke a Continental Captain followed by a Lieutenant came up in the torchlight; and I gave him his salute and rendered an account of what had happened on the Drowned Lands.

He seemed deeply disturbed but told me he had orders to defend the Mayfield Fort. He added, however, that if I must report at Johnstown he would give me a squad of musket-men as escort thither.

"Yes, sir," said I, "my report should not be delayed. But I have Nick Stoner and an Indian, and apprehend no danger. So if I may beg a dish of porridge for my little company, and dry my clothing by your block-house fireplace, I shall set out within the hour."

He was very civil,—a tall, haggard, careworn man, whose wife and children lived at Torloch, and their undefended situation caused him deep anxiety.

So I walked to the Fort, Nick and my Indian following; and presently saw Penelope on the rifle-platform of the stockade, among the soldiers.

She was gazing at the fiery sky in the north when I caught sight of her and called her name.

For a moment she bent swiftly down over the pickets as though to pierce the dark where my voice came from; then she turned, and was descending the ladder when I entered by the postern.

As I came up she took my shoulders between both hands, but said nothing, and I saw she had trouble to speak.

"Yes," said I, "there is bad news for you. Your pretty Summer House is no more, Penelope."

"Oh," she stammered, "did you—did you suppose it was the loss of a house that has driven me out o' my five senses?"

"Are your sheep and cattle safe?" I asked in sudden alarm.

"My God," she breathed, and stood with her face in both hands, there at the foot of the ladder under the April stars.

"What is it frightens you?" I asked.

Her hands fell to her side and she looked at me: "Nothing, sir. . . . Unless it be myself," she said calmly. "Your clothing is wet and you are shivering. Will you come into the fort?"

We went in. I remembered how I had seen her there that night, nearly a year ago, and all the soldiers gathered around to entertain her, whilst she supped on porridge and smiled upon them over her yellow bowl's edge, like a very child.

The few soldiers inside rose respectfully. A sergeant drew a settle to the blazing fire; a soldier brought us soupaan and a gill of rum. Nick came in with the Saguenay, and they both squatted down in their blankets before the fire, grave as a pair o' cats; and there they ate their fill of porridge at our feet, and blinked at the blaze and smoked their clays in silence.

I told Penelope that we must travel this night to Johnstown, it being my duty to give an account of what had happened, without delay.

"There can be no danger to us on the road," said I, "but the thought of leaving you here in this fort disturbs me."

"What would I do here alone?" she asked.

"What will you do alone in Johnstown?" I inquired in turn.

At the same time I realized that we both were utterly homeless; and that in Johnstown our shelter must be a tavern, or, if danger threatened, the fortified jail called Johnstown Fort.

"You will not abandon me, will you, sir?" she asked, touching my sleeve with the pretty confidence of a child.

"Why, no," said I. "We can lodge at Jimmy Burke's Tavern. And there is Nick to give us countenance—and a most respectable Indian."

"Is it scandalous for me to go thither in your company?"

"What else is there for us to do?"

"I should go to Albany," said she, "as soon as may be. And I am resolved to do so and to seek out Mr. Fonda and disembarrass you of any further care for me."

"It is no burden," said I; "but I do not know where I shall be sent, now that the war is come to Tryon County. And—I can not bear to think of you alone and unprotected, living the miserable life of a refugee in the women's quarters at Johnstown Fort."

"Does solicitude for my welfare truly occupy your thoughts, sir?"

"Why, yes, and naturally. Are we not close friends and comrades in misfortune, Penelope?"

"I counted it no misfortune to live at Summer House."

"No, nor I. . . . I was very happy there. . . . Alas for your pretty cottage!—poor little châtelaine of Summer House!"

"John Drogue?"

"I hear you."

"Did you suppose I ever meant to take that gift of you?"

"Why—why, yes! I gave it! Even now I have the deed to the land and shall convey it to you. And one day, God willing, a new cottage shall be built——"

"Then you must build it, John Drogue, for the land is yours and I never meant to take it of you, and never shall. . . . And I thank you,—and am deeply beholden—and touched in my heart's deep depths—that you have offered this to me. . . . Because you desired me to be respectable, and well considered by men. . . . And you wished me to possess substance which I lacked—so that none could dare use me lightly and without consideration. . . . And I promise you that I have learned my lesson. You have schooled me well, Mr. Drogue. . . . And if for no other reason save respect for you, and gratitude, I promise you I shall so conduct hereafter that you shall have no reason to think contemptuously of me."

"I never held you in contempt."

"Yes; when I stole your horse; and when you deemed me easy—and proved me so——"

"I meant it not that way!" said I, reddening.

"Yet it was so, John Drogue. I was not difficult. I meant no harm, but had not sense enough to know harm when it approached me! . . . And so I thank you for schooling me. But I never could have taken any gift from you."

After a silence I rose and went into the officer's quarters.

The Continental Captain was lying on his trundle-bed, but got up and sent two men to harness Kaya to our waggon.

I told him I should leave all stores and provisions with him, and asked if he would look after our sheep and cattle and fowls until they could be fetched to Johnstown and cared for there.

He was a most kindly man, and promised to care for our creatures, saying that the eggs and milk would be welcome to his garrison, and that if he took a lamb or two he would pay for it on demand.

So when our waggon drove up in the darkness outside, he came and took leave of us all very kindly, saying he hoped that Penelope would be safe in Johnstown, and that the raiders would soon be driven out of the Sacandaga.

I gave him our canoe, for which he seemed grateful.

Then I helped Penelope into the waggon, got in myself and took the reins. Nick and the Saguenay vaulted into the box and lay down on our pile of furs and blankets.

And so we drove out of the stockade and onto the Johnstown Road, Penelope in a wolf-robe beside me, and both her hands clasped around my left arm.

"Are you a-chill?" I asked.

"I do not know what ails me," she murmured, "but—the world is so vast and dark. . . . and God is so far—so far——"

"You are unhappy."

"No."

"You grieve for somebody?"

"No, I do not grieve."

"Are you lonesome?"

"I do not know if I am. . . . I do not know why I tremble so. . . . The world is so dark and vast. . . . I am so small a thing to be alone in it. . . . It is the war, perhaps, that awes me. It seems so near now. Alas for the battles to be fought!—the battles in the North. . . . Where you shall be, John Drogue."

"You said that once before."

"Yes. I saw you there against a cannon's rising cloud. . . . And a white shape near you."

"You said it was Death," I reminded her.

"Death or a bride. . . . I did not wish to see that vision. I never desire to see such things."

"Pooh! Do you really believe in dreams, Penelope?"

"There were strange uniforms there," she murmured, "—not red-coats."

"Oh; green-coats!"

"No. I never saw the like. I never saw such soldiery in England or in France or in America."

"They were only dream soldiers," said I gaily. "So now you must laugh a little, and take heart, Penelope, because if we two have been made homeless this night by fire, still we are young, and in health, and have all life before us. Come, then! Shall we be melancholy? And if there are to be battles in the North, why, there will be battles, and some must die and some survive.

"So, in the meanwhile, shall we be merry?"

"If you wish, sir."

"Excellent! Sing me a pretty French song—low voiced—in my ear, Penelope, whilst I guide my horse."

"What song, sir?"

"What you will."

So, holding my arm with both her hands, she leaned close to me on the jolting seat and placed her lips at my ear; and

sang "Malbrook," as we drove toward Johnstown through the dark forest under the April stars.

Something hot touched my cheek.

"Why, Penelope!" said I, "are you weeping?"

She shook her head, rested her forehead a moment against my shoulder, and, sitting so, strove to continue—

"Il ne—ne reviendra—"

Her voice sank to a tremulous whisper and she bowed her face in her two hands and rested so in silence, her slender form swaying with the swaying waggon.

It was plain to me that the child was afeard. The shock of flight, the lurid tokens of catastrophe in the heavens, the alarming rumours in those darkening hours, anxiety, suspense, all had contributed to shake a heart both gentle and courageous.

For in the thickening gloom around us a very murk of murder seemed to brood over this dark and threatened land, seeming to grow more sinister and more imminent as the fading crimson in the northern heavens paled to a sickly hue in the first faint pallor of the coming dawn.

CHAPTER XXV

BURKE'S TAVERN

NOW, whether it was the wetting I got on Mayfield Creek and the chill I took on the long night's journey to Johnstown, or if my thigh-wound became inflamed from that day's exertion at Fish House, Summer House, and Mayfield, I do not know for certain.

But when at sunrise we drove up to Jimmy Burke's Tavern in Johnstown, I discovered that I could not move my right leg; and, to my mortification, Nick and my Indian were forced to make a swinging chair of their linked hands, and carry me into the tavern, Penelope following forlornly, her arms full of furs and blankets.

Here was a pretty dish! But try as I might I could not set my foot to the ground; so they laid me upon a bed and stripped me, and my Saguenay wrapped my leg in hot blankets and laid furs over me, till I was wet with sweat to the hair.

Presently comes Jimmy Burke himself—that lively, lovable scamp, to whom all were friendly; for he was both kind and gay, though a great braggart, and few believed that he had any stomach for the deeds he said he meant to do in battle.

"Faith," says he, "it's Misther Drogue, God bless him, an' in a sad plight along o' the bloody Sacandaga Tories! Wisha then, sorr, had I been there it's me would ha' trimmed the hair o' them!"

"Are you well, Jimmy?" I inquired, smiling, spite my pain.

"Am I well? I am that! I was never fitter f'r to fight thim dirty green coats of Sir John's. Och—the poor lad! Lave me fetch a hot brick——"

"I'm lame as a one-legged duck, Jimmy," said I. "Send word to the Fort that I've an account to render, and beg the Commandant to overlook my tardiness until I can be carried thither on a litter."

"And th' yoong leddy, sorr? Will she bait here?"

"Yes; where is she?"

"She lies on a wolf-skin on the bed in the next chamber, fore-

ninst the wall, sorr. There's tears on her purty face, but I think she sleeps, f'r all that. Is she hurted, too, Misther Drogue?"

"Oh, no. When she wakes send a maid-servant to care for her. Find a loft-bed for my Indian and give him no rum—mind that, James Burke!—or we quarrel."

"Th' red divil gets no sup in my shabeen!" said he. "Do I lave him gorge or no?"

"Certainly. Let him stuff himself. And let no man use him with contempt. He is faithful and brave. He is my *friend.* Do you mark me, Jimmy?"

"I do, sorr. And Nick Stoner—that long-legged limb of Satan! —av he plays anny thricks on Jimmy Burke may God help him—the poor little scut!——"

I had some faint recollection of pranks played upon Burke by Nick in this same tavern; but what he had done to Jimmy I did not remember, save that it had set Sir William and the town all a-laughing.

"Nick is a good lad and my friend," said I. "Use him kindly. Your wit is a match for his, anyway, and so are your fists."

"Is it so!" muttered Burke, casting a smouldering side-look at me. "D'ye mind what he done three year come Shrove Tuesday? The day I gave out I was a better man than Sir William's new blacksmith? Well, then—av ye disremember—that scut of a Nick shtole me breeches, an' he put them on a billy-goat, an' tuk him to the tap-room where was company. An', 'Here,' says he, 'is a better Irishman than you, Jimmy Burke!—an' a better fighter, too.' An' wid that the damned goat rares up an' butts me over; an' up I gets an' he butts me over, an' up an' down I go, an' the five wits clean knocked out o' me, an' the company an' Sir William all yelling like loons an' laying odds on the goat——"

I lay there convulsed with laughter, remembering now this prank of the most mischievous boy I ever knew.

Burke licked his lips grimly at the memory of that ancient wrong.

"Sure, he's th' bould wan f'r to come into me house wid the score unreckoned an' all that balance agin' him."

"Touch pewter with him and forgive the lad," said I. "These are sterner days, Jimmy, and we should cherish no private malice here where we may be put to it to stand siege."

"Is it thrue, sor, that the destructives are on the Sacandaga?"

"Yes, it is true. Fish House, Summer House, and Fonda's Bush are in ashes, Jimmy, and your late friend, Sir John, is at

Buck Island with a thousand Indians, regulars, and Tories, and like to pay us a call before planting time."

"Oh, my God," says Burke, "the divil take Sir John an' the black heart of him av he comes back here to murther his old neighbors! Sorra the day we let him scape!—him an' Alex White, an' Toby Tice an' moody Wally Butler,—an' ould John, an' Indian Claus, an' Black Guy!—may the divil take the whole Tory ruck o' them!——"

He checked himself; behind him, through the door, entered a Continental Captain; and I sat up in bed to do him courtesy.

As I suspected, here proved to be our Commandant come to learn of me my news; and it presently appeared that Nick had run to the jail with an account of how I lay here crippled.

Well, the Commandant was a simple, kindly man, whose present anxiety made little of military custom. And so he had come instantly to learn my news of me; and we talked there alone for an hour.

At his summons a servant fetched paper, ink, pen and sand; and, whilst he looked on, I wrote out my report to him.

Also, I made for him a drawing of the Drowned Lands from Fish House to Mayfield, marking all roads and paths and trails, and all canoe water, carries, and cleared land. For, as Brent-Meester, no man had more accurate knowledge of Tryon than had I; and it was all clearly in my mind, so that to make a map of it proved no task at all.

I asked him if I was to remain detached and with authority to raise a company of rangers—as had once been given me—or whether, perhaps, the Line lacked commissioned officers, saying that it was all one to me and that I wished only to serve where most needed.

He replied that, unless I went to Morgan's corps of Virginia Riflemen, concerning which detail he had heard some talk, my full value lay in my woodcraft and in my wide, personal knowledge of the wilderness.

"Who better than you, Mr. Drogue, could take a scout to this same Buck Island, where Sir John's hordes are gathering? Who better than yourself could undertake a swift and secret mission to any point within the confines of this vast desolation of mountain, lake, and forest, which promises soon to be the theatre of a most bloody struggle?

"Champlain already spews red-coats upon us in the North. Sir John threatens in the West. A great army menaces the Highland Forts and Albany from the South. And only such officers as you,

sir, are competent to discover and dog the march of enemy marauders, come to touch with their scouts, follow and ambush them, and lead others to vital points across an uncharted world of woods when there are raiders to check or communications to threaten and cut."

He rose, hooked up his sword, and shook hands with me.

"I have asked Colonel Willett," said he, "to use your talents in this manner, and he has very kindly consented. Johnstown will remain your base, therefore, and your employment is certain as soon as you are able to walk."

I thanked him and said very confidently that I should be rid of all lameness and pain within a day or so.

That night I had a fever; and for nearly four weeks my leg remained swollen and red, and the pain was such that I could not bear the weight of a linen sheet, and Nick made a frame for my bed-covers, like a tent, so that they should not touch me.

Dr. Younglove came from the Flatts,—who was surgeon in General Herkimer's brigade of militia—and he said it was a pernicious rheumatism consequent upon the cold wetting I got upon a wound still green.

Further, he concluded, there was naught to do save that I must lie on my back until my trouble departed of its own accord; but he could not say how soon that might me—whether within a day or two or as many months, or more.

He recommended hot blankets and some draughts which they sent me from the pharmacy at the Fort, but I think they did me neither good nor evil, but were pleasant and spicy and cooled my throat.

So that was now the dog's life I led during the early summer in Johnstown,—a most vexatious and inglorious career, laid by the heels at a time when, from three points o' the compass, three separate storms were brewing and darkening the heavens, and a tempest more frightful than man could conceive was threatening to shatter Tryon, sweep the whole Mohawk Valley, and leave Johnstown but a whirl of whitened ashes in the evening winds.

We were comfortably established at Burke's Inn, and, as always, baited well where food and bed were ever clean and good.

Penelope had the chamber next to mine; Nick slept in the little bedroom on my left; and the Saguenay haunted the kitchen, with a perpetual appetite never damaged by gorging.

All the news of town and country was fetched me by word

o' mouth, by penny broadsides, by journals, so that I never wanted for gossip to entertain or alarm me.

Town tattle, rumours from West and North, camp news conveyed by Coureurs-du-Bois, by runners, by expresses, all this came to my chamber where I lay impatient, brought sometimes by Burke, often by Nick, more often by Penelope.

She was very kind and patient with me. In the first feverish and agonizing days of my illness I had sent for her, and begged her to take the first convenient waggon and escort into Albany, where surely Douw Fonda would now care for her and the Patroon's household would welcome and shelter her until the oncoming storm had passed and her aged charge should again return to Caughnawaga.

She would not go, but gave no reason. And, my sickness making me peevish, I was often fretful and short with her; and so badgered and bullied her that one night, in desperation, she wrote a letter to Douw Fonda at my request, offering to go to Albany and care for him if he desired it.

But presently there came a polite letter in reply, writ kindly to her by the young Patroon himself, who very delicately revealed how it was with Mr. Fonda. And it appeared that he had become childish from great age, and seemed now to retain no memory of her, and desired not to be cared for by anybody—as he said—who was a stranger to him.

Which was sad to know concerning so good and wise and gallant an old gentleman as had been Mr. Douw Fonda,—a fine, honourable, educated and cultivated man, whose chiefest pleasure was in his books and garden, and who never in all his life had uttered an unkind word.

This news, too, was disturbing in another manner; for Mr. Fonda had wished, as all knew, to adopt Penelope and make provision for her. And now, if his mind had begun to cloud and his memory betray him, no provision was likely to be made to support this young girl who was utterly alone in the world, and entirely without fortune.

On an afternoon late in May I was feeling less pain, and could permit the covers to rest on me, and was impatient for a dish o' porridge. About five o'clock Penelope brought me a bowl of chocolate. When she had seated herself near me, she took her sewing from her apron pocket, and stitched away busily whilst I drank my sweet, hot brew, and watched her over the blue bowl's edge.

"Are you better this afternoon, sir?" she inquired presently, not lifting her eyes.

I told her, fretfully, that I was but a lame dog and fit only to be knocked on the head by some obliging Tory. "I'm sick o' life," said I, "where no one heeds me, and I am left alone all day without food or companionship, to play at twiddle-thumb."

At that she looked at me in sweet concern, but, seeing me wear a wry grin, smiled too.

"Poor lad," said she, "it is nearly a month you lie there so patiently."

"Not patiently; no! And if I knew more oaths than I think up all day long it might ease me to endure more meekly this accursed sickness. . . . What is it you sew?"

"Wrist-bands."

"Whose?"

As she offered no reply I supposed that she was making a pair o' bands for Nick.

"Do you hear further from Albany?" I inquired.

"No, sir."

"Then it is sure that Mr. Fonda has become childish and his memory is gone," said I, "because if he comprehended your present situation and your necessity he would surely have sent for you long since."

"He always was kind," she said simply.

I lay on my pillows, sipping chocolate and watching her fingers so deft with thread and needle. After a long silence I asked her rather bluntly why she had not long ago consented to the necessary legal steps offered her by Mr. Fonda, which would have secured her always against want.

As she made me no answer, I looked hard at her over my bowl, and saw her eyes very faintly glimmering with tears.

"The news of Mr. Fonda's condition has greatly saddened you," said I.

"Yes. He was kind to me."

"Why, then, did you evade his expressed wishes?" I repeated. "He must surely have loved you like a father to offer you adoption."

"I could not accept," she said in a low voice, sewing rapidly the while.

"Why not?"

"I scarcely know. It was because of pride, perhaps. . . . I was his servant. He paid me well. I could not permit him to overpay my poor services. . . . And he has other children, and

grandchildren, with whose proper claims I would not permit myself—or him—to interfere. No, it was unthinkable—however kindly meant——"

"That," said I impatiently, "smacks of a too Scotch and stubborn conscience, does it not, Penelope?"

"Stubborn Scotch pride, I fear. For it is not in my Scottish nature to accept benefits for which I never can hope to render service in return."

"Imaginary obligation!" said I scornfully, yet admiring the independence which, naked and defenceless, prefers to spin its own raiment rather than accept the divided cloak of charity.

And it was plain to me that this girl was no beggar, no passive accepter of bounties unearned from anybody. And now I was secretly chagrined and ashamed that I had so postured before her as My Lord Bountiful, and had offered her the Summer House who had refused a modest fortune from a good old man who loved her and who had some excuse and reason to so deal by one to whom his bodily comfort had long been beholden.

"Few," said I, "would have put aside so agreeable an opportunity for ease and comfort in life. I fear you were foolish, Penelope."

She smiled at me: "There is a family saying, 'A Grant grants but never accepts.' . . . I have youth, health, two arms, two legs, and a pair of steady eyes. If these can not keep me alive through the world's journey, then I ought to perish and make room for another."

"What do you meditate to keep you?" I asked uneasily.

"For the present," said she, still smiling, "what I am doing is well enough to keep me in food and clothes and lodging."

At first I did not understand her, then an odd suspicion seized me; for I remembered during the last two weeks, when I lay sick, hearing strange voices in her antechamber, and strange people coming and going in the passageway.

Seeing me perplexed and frowning, she laughed and took the empty bowl from my hands, and set it aside. Then she smoothed my pillow.

"I am employed by the garrison," said she, "to work for them with needle and shears. I do their mending; I darn, stitch, sew, and alter. I patch shirts and under-garments; I also make shirts, and devise officers' neck-cloths, stocks, and wrist-bands at request.

"Also, I now employ a half-breed Oneida woman as tailoress; and she first measures and then I cut out patterns of coats, breeches, rifle-frocks, and watch-coats, which she then takes home

and sews, then tries on her customers, and finally finishes,—I sewing on all galons, laces, and braids. . . . And so you see I pay my way, Mr. Drogue, and am in no stress for the present at any rate."

"Good heavens!" said I amazed, "I never dreamed that you were so employed!"

"But I am obliged to eat, John Drogue!"

"I have sufficient for both," I muttered. "I thought it was understood——"

"That I should live on your bounty, my lord?"

"Will you ever have done with lording me?" I said angrily. "I think you do it to plague me."

"I ask forgiveness," she murmured, still smiling. "Also, I crave pardon for refusing to live on your kind bounty."

"I do not mean it that way!" said I sharply. "Besides, you kept Summer House for us, and did all things indoors and most things outdoor; and had no pay for the labour——"

"I had food and a bed. And your protection. . . . And most excellent company," she added, smiling saucily upon me. "You owe me nothing, John Drogue. Nor do I mean to owe you,—or any man,—more than that proper debt of kindness which kindness to me begets."

I lay back on my pillows, not knowing whether to laugh or scowl. That Penelope had become a tailoress and sempstress to the garrison did not pleasure me at all; and it was as though I had lost some advantage or influence over this girl, whose present situation and whose future did now considerably begin to concern me.

Yet, what was I to say against this business, or what offer make her that her modesty and pride could consider?

It was perfectly clear to me that she never had intended to be obliged to me for anything, and never would be. And now her saucy smile and gentle mockery confirmed this conclusion and put me out of countenance.

I cast a troubled glance at her from my pillow, where she sat by my bed sewing on a pair of wristbands for some popinjay of the garrison—God knew who he might be!—and, as I regarded her, further and further she seemed to be slipping out of my influence and out of the care which, mentally at least, I had felt it my duty to give to her.

She troubled me. She troubled me deeply. Her independence, her sufficiency, her beauty, her sly and pretty mockery of me, all conspired to give me a new concern for her, and I had not

experienced the like since Steve Watts kissed her by the lilacs. I had seen her in many phases, but never before in this phase, and I knew not what face to put on such a disturbing situation.

For a while I lay there frowning and sulky, and spoke not. She tranquilly finished her wristbands, went to her chamber, returned with a dozen stocks, all cut out and basted, and picked up one to fit a plain military frill to it.

From my window, near where my head rested, I saw a gold sunset between the maple trees and the roofs across the street. Birds sang their evening carols,—robins on every fence post, orioles in the elms, and far away a wood-thrush filled the quiet with his liquid ecstasies.

And suddenly it seemed to me horrible and monstrous that this heavenly tranquillity should be shattered by the red blast of war!—that men could actually be planning to devastate this quiet land where already the new harvest promised, tender and green; where cattle grazed in blossoming meadows; where swallows twittered and fowls clucked; where smoke drifted from chimneys and the homely sights and sounds of a peaceful town sweetened the evening silence.

Then the thought of my own helplessness went through me like a spear, and I groaned,—not meaning to,—and turned over on my pillow. . . . And presently felt her hand lightly on my shoulder.

"Is it pain?" she asked softly.

"No, only the weariness of life," I muttered.

She was silent, but presently her hand smoothed back my hair, and passed in a sort of gentle rhythm across my forehead and my hair.

"If I lie here long enough," said I bitterly, "I may have to beg a crust of you. So get you to your sewing and see that you earn enough against a beggared cripple's need."

"You mock me," she said in a low voice.

"Why, no," said I. "If I am to remain crippled my funds will dwindle and go, and one day I shall sit in the sun like any poor old soldier, with palm lifted for alms——"

"I beg—I beg you——" she stammered; and her hand closed on my lips as though to stifle the perverse humour.

"Would you offer me charity if I remain crippled?" I managed to say.

"Hush. You sadden me."

"Would you aid me?" I insisted.

She drew a long, deep breath but made no answer.

"Tell me," I repeated, taking her by the hand, "would you aid me, Penelope Grant?"

"Why do you ask?" she protested. "You know I would."

"And yet," said I, "although I am in funds, you refuse aid and choose rather to play the tailoress! Is that fair?"

"But—I am nothing to you——"

"Are you not? And am I then more to you than are you to me, that you would aid me in necessity?"

She drew her hand from mine and went back to her chair.

"That is my fate," said she, smiling at me. "I was born to give, not to receive. I can not take; I can not refuse to give."

"Yes," said I, "you even gave me your lips once."

She blushed vividly, her eyes hard on her sewing.

"I shall not do the like again," said she, all rosy to the roots of her gold hair.

"And why, pray?"

"Because I know better now."

After a silence I turned me on my pillow and sighed heavily.

"John?" she inquired in gentle anxiety, "are you in great pain?"

I groaned.

She came to me again and laid her cool, soft hand on my head; and I caught it in both of mine and drew her down to me.

"I am a cripple and a beggar for your kindness, Penelope," I said. "I ask alms of you. Will you kiss me?"

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you have deceived me! Let me go! Loose me instantly!"

"Will you kiss me out of that charity which you say you practice?"

"That is not charity!——"

"What is begged for is charity. And you say you are made to give."

"But you taught me otherwise! And now you undo your own schooling!——"

"But I owe it you—this kiss!"

"How do you owe it me?"

"You kissed me in the snow, and left me in your debt."

"Oh, goodness! That frolic! Have you not long ago forgotten our winter madness——"

"Like you," said I, "I must pay my just debts and owe nobody." And I drew her nearer, all flushed with protest, firm to escape, yet gentle in her supple, pretty way lest she hurt me.

I laughed, and saw my gaiety reflected in her eyes an instant.

Then, of a sudden, she put one arm around my neck and rested her lips on mine. And so I kissed her, and she suffered it, resting so against me with lowered eyes.

The flower-sweetness of her mouth bewildered me, and I was confused by it and by the stifled tumult of my heart, so that I scarce had sense enough to detain her when she drew away.

She sat at my side, the faint smile still stamped on her lips, but her brown eyes seemed a little frightened, and her breast rose and fell like a scared bird's under the snowy kerchief.

"Well—and well," says she in her pretty, breathless way—"I am overpaid, I think, and you are now acquitted of your debt. And so—and so our folly ends . . . and now is finally ended."

She took her sewing. A golden light was in the room; and she seemed to me the loveliest thing I had ever looked upon. I realized it. I knew she was loveliest of all. And the swift knowledge seemed to choke me.

After a little while she stole a look at me, met my eyes, laughed guiltily.

"You!" said she, "a schoolmaster! You teach me one thing and would have me practice another. What confidence can I entertain for such wisdom as is yours, John Drogue?"

"Rules," said I, "are made to be proven by their more interesting exceptions. However, in future you are to endure no kiss and no caress—unless from me."

"Oh. Is that the new lesson I am to learn and understand?"

"That is the lesson. Will you remember it when I am gone?"

"Gone?"

"Yes. When I am gone away on duty. Will you remember, Penelope?"

"I am like to," she said under her breath, and sewing rapidly.

She stitched on in silence for a while; but now the light was dimming and she moved nearer the window, which was close by my bed head.

After a while her hands dropped in her lap; she looked out into the twilight. I took her tired little hand in mine, but she did not turn her head.

"I have," said I, "two thousand pounds stirling at my solicitor's in Albany. I wish you to have it if any accident happens to me. . . . And my glebe in Fonda's Bush. . . . I shall so write it in my will."

She shook her head slightly, still gazing from the window.

"Will you accept?" I asked.

"What good would it do me? If I accept it I should only divide it among the needy—in memory of—of my dear boy friend —Jack Drogue——"

She rose hastily and walked to the door, then very slowly retraced her steps to my bedside.

"You are so kind to me," she murmured, touching my forehead. "You are so different to other men,—so truly gallant in your boy's soul. There is no evil in you,—no ruthlessness. Oh, I know—I know—more than I seem to know—of men. . . . And their importunities. . . . And of their wilful selfishness."

I sat up straight. "Has any man made you unhappy?" I demanded in angry surprise.

She seated herself and looked at me gravely.

"Do you know," she said, "men have courted me always—even when I was scarce more than a child? And mine is a friendly heart, Mr. Drogue. I have a half shy desire to please. I am loath to inflict pain. But always my kindness seems like to cost me more than I choose to pay."

"Pay to whom?"

"To any man. . . . For example, I would not elope with Stephen Watts when he begged me at Caughnawaga. And Walter Butler addressed me also—in secret—being a friend of the Fondas and so free of the house. . . . And was ever stealthily importuning me to a stolen rendezvous which I had sense enough to refuse, knowing him to be both married and a rake, and cruel to women.

"Oh, I tell you that they all courted me,—not kindly,—for ever there seemed to me in their ardent gaze and discreet whisperings something vaguely sinister. Not that it frightened me, nor did I take alarm, being too ignorant——"

She folded her hands and looked down at them.

"I like men. . . . I cared most for Stephen Watts. . . . Then one day I had a great fright. . . . Shall I tell it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, Sir John's gallantries neither pleased nor flattered me from the first. But he was very cautious what he said and did in Douw Fonda's house, and never spoke to me save coldly when others were present, or when he was alone with us and Mr. Fonda was awake and not dozing in his great chair. . . . Well, there came a day when Mr. Fonda went to the house of Captain Fonda, and I was alone in the house. . . .

"And Sir John came. . . . Shall I tell it?"

"Tell it, Penelope."

"I've had it long in my mind. I wished to ask you if it les-

sened me in your esteem. . . . For Sir John was drunk, and, finding me alone, he conducted roughly—and followed me and locked us in my chamber. . . . I was horribly afraid. . . . I had never struck any living being before. But I beat his red face with my hands until he became confused and stupid—and there was blood on him and on me. . . . And my kerchief was torn off and my hair all tangled. . . . I beat him till he dropped my door key, and so unlocked my door and returned again to him, silent and flaming, and drove him with blows out o' my chamber and out of the house—all over blood as he was, and stupid and drunk. . . . His negro man got him on his horse and rode off, holding him on.

"And none knew—none know, save Sir John and you and I."

After a silence I said in a controlled voice: "If Sir John comes this way I shall hope not to miss him. . . . I shall pray God not to miss this—gentleman."

"Do you think meanly of me that he used me so?"

I did not answer.

"I have told you all," she said timidly. "I am still honest. If I were not I would not have let you touch my lips."

"Why not?"

"For both our sakes. . . . I would not do you any evil."

I said impatiently: "No need to tell me you never had a lover. I never believed it of you from the day I saw you first. And, God willing, I mean to stop a mouth or two in Tryon, war or no war——"

"John Drogue!" she exclaimed in consternation—"you shall seek no quarrel on my account! Swear to me!"

But I made no reply. Whatever the quarrel, I knew now it was to be on my own account; for whether or no I was falling in love with this girl, Penelope Grant, I realized at all events that I would suffer no other man to interfere, however he conducted, and should hold any man to stern account who would make of this girl a toy and plaything.

And so, all hotly resolved on that point; sore, also, at the knowledge of Sir John's baseness which seemed to touch my proper honour; and swifter, too, with tenderness in my heart to reassure her, I did exactly that for which I was now prepared to cut the throats of various other gentlemen—I drew her into my arms and held her close, body and lips imprisoned.

She sought her chair and sat there silent and subdued until a maid-servant brought lights and my supper.

In the candle light she ventured to look at me and laugh.

"Such schooling!" says she. "I never knew before that there was such a personage as a sweetheart pro tem! But you seem to know the rôle by heart, Mr. Drogue. And so, no doubt, feel warranted to instruct others. But this is the end of it, my friend. For one day you shall have to confess you to your wife! And I think my future Lady Northesk is like to have a pretty temper and will give you a mauvais quart d'heur when she hears of this May day's folly in a Johnstown public house!"

CHAPTER XXVI

ORDERS

IN June I was out o' bed and managed to set foot on ground for the first time since early spring. By the end of the month I had my strength in a measure and was able to hobble about town. Pernicious rheumatism is no light matter, for with the agony,—and weakness afterward,—a dull despair settles upon the victim; and it was mind, not body, that caused me the deeper distress, I think.

Life seemed useless; effort hopeless. Dark apprehensions obsessed me; I despaired of my country, of my people, of myself. And this all was part of my malady, but I did not know it.

All through June and July an oppressive summer heat brooded over Tryon. Save for thunder storms of unusual violence, the heat remained unbroken day and night. In the hot and blinding blue of heaven, a fierce sun blazed; at night the very moon looked sickly with the heat.

Never had I heard so many various voices of the night, nor so noisy a tumult after dark, where the hylas trilled an almost deafening chorus and the big frogs' stringy croaking never ceased, and a myriad confusion of insects chirred and creaked and hummed in the suffocating dark.

At dawn the birds' outburst was like the loud outrush of a torrent filling the waking world; at twilight scores of unseen whippoorwills put on their shoes * and shouted in whistling whisper voices to one another across the wastes of night like the False Faces † gathering at a secret tryst.

If the whole Northland languished, drooping and drowsy in the heat, the very air, too, seemed heavy with the foreboding gloom of dreadful rumours.

Every day came ominous tidings from North, from West, from South of great forces uniting to march hither and crush us. And the terrible imminence of catastrophe, far from arousing and

* Indian lore. The yellow moccasin flower is the whippoorwill's shoe.
† A secret society common to all nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

nerving us for the desperate event, seemed rather to confuse and daze our people, and finally to stupefy all, as though the horror of the immense and hellish menace were beyond human comprehension.

Men laboured on the meagre defences of the county as though weighted by a nightmare—as though drowsing awake and not believing in their ghostly dream.

And all preparation went slow—fearfully slow—and it was like dragging a mass of chained men, whose minds had been drugged, to drive the militia to the drill ground or force the labourers to the unfinished parapets of our few and scattered forts.

Men still talked of the Sacandaga Block House as though there were such a refuge; but there was none unless they meant the ruins at Fish House or the unburned sheepfold at Summer House Point, or the Mayfield defenses.

There remained only one fort of consequence south of the Lakes—Fort Stanwix, now called Schuyler, and that was far from finished, far from properly armed, garrisoned, and provisioned.

Whatever else of defense Tryon County possessed were merest makeshifts—stone farmhouses fortified by ditch, stockade, and bastions; blockhouses of wood; nothing more.

Fragments of our two regular regiments were ever shifting garrison—a company here, a battalion there. A few rangers kept the field; a regiment of Herkimer's militia, from time to time, took its turn at duty; a scout or two of irregulars and Oneida Indians haunted the trail toward Buck Island—which some call Deer Island, and others speak of as Carleton Island, and others still name it Ile-aux-Chevreuil, which is a mistake.

But any name for the damned spot was good enough for me, who had been there in years past, and knew how strong it could be made to defy us and to send out armed hordes to harass us on the Mohawk.

And at that instant, under Colonel Barry St. Leger, the Western flying force of the enemy was being marshalled at Buck Island.

Our scouts brought an account of the forces already there—detachments of the 8th British regulars, the 34th regulars, the regiment of Sir John, called the Royal New Yorkers by some, by others the Greens—(though our scouts told us that their new uniforms were to be scarlet)—the Corps of Chasseurs, a regiment of green-coats known as Butler's Rangers, a detachment of Royal Artillery, another of Highlanders, and, most sinister of all, Brant's

Iroquois under Thayendanegea himself and a number of young officers of the Indian Department, with Colonel Claus to advise them.

This was the flying force that threatened us from the West, directed by Burgoyne.

From the South we were menaced by the splendid and powerful British army which held New York City, Long Island, and the lower Hudson, and stood ready and equipped to march on a straight road right into Albany, cleaning up the Hudson, shore and stream, on their way hither.

But our most terrible danger threatened us from the North, where General Burgoyne, with a superb army and a half thousand Iroquois savages, had been smashing his way toward us through the forests, seizing the lakes and the vessels and forts defending them, outmanœuvring our General St. Clair; driving him from our fortress of Ticonderoga with loss of all stores and baggage; driving Francis out of Skenesborough and Fort Anne, and destroying both posts; chasing St. Clair out of Castleton and Hubbardton, destroying two-thirds of Warner's army; driving Schuyler's undisciplined militia from Fort Edward, toward Saratoga.

Every day brought rumours or positive news of disasters in our immediate neighbourhood. We knew that St. Leger, Sir John, Walter Butler, and Brant had left Buck Island and that Burgoyne was directing the campaign planned for the most hated army that ever invaded the Northland. And we learned the horrid details of these movements from Thomas Spencer, the Oneida who had just come in from that region, and whose certain account of how matters were swiftly coming to a crisis at last seemed to galvanize our people into action.

I was now, in August, well enough to take the field with a scout, and I applied for active duty and was promised it; but no orders came, and I haunted the Johnstown Fort impatiently, certain that every man who rode express and who went galloping through the town must bring my marching orders.

Precious days succeeded one another; I fretted, fumed, sickened with anxiety, deemed myself forgotten or perhaps disdained.

Then I had a shock when General Herkimer, ignoring me, sent for my Saguenay, but for what purpose I knew not, only that old Klock's loud-voiced son-in-law, Colonel Cox, desired a Montagnais tracker.

The Yellow Leaf came to me with the courier, one Barent Westerfelt, who had brought presents from Colonel Cox; and I

had no discretion in the matter, nor would have exercised any if I had.

"Brother," said I, taking him by both hands, "go freely with this messenger from General Herkimer; because if you were not sorely needed our brother Corlear had not ordered an express to find and fetch you."

He replied that he made nothing of the presents sent him, but desired to remain with me. I patiently pointed out to him that I was merely a subaltern in the State Rangers and unattached, and that I must await my turn of duty like a good soldier, nor feel aggrieved if fortune called others first.

Still he seemed reluctant, and would not go, and scowled at the express rider and his sack of gew-gaws.

"Brother," said I, "would you shame me who, as you say, found you a wild beast and have taught you that you are a real man?"

"I *am* a man and a warrior," he said quickly.

"Real men and warriors are known by their actions, my younger brother. When there is war they shine their hatchets. When the call comes, they bound into the war-trail. Brother, the call has come! Hiero!"

The Montagnais straightened his body and threw back his narrow, dangerous head.

"Haih!" he said. "I hear my brother's voice coming to me through the forests! Very far away beyond the mountains I hear the panther-cry of the Mengwe! My axe is bright! I am in my paint. Koué! I go!"

He left within the hour; and I had become attached to the wild rover of the Saguenay, and missed him the more, perhaps, because of my own sore heart which beat so impotently within my idle body.

That Herkimer had taken him disconcerted and discouraged me; but there was a more bitter blow in store for a young soldier of no experience in discipline or in the slow habit of military procedure; for, judge of my wrath when one rainy day in August comes Nick Stoner to me in a new uniform of the line, saying that Colonel Livingston's regiment lacked musicians, and he had thought it best to transfer and to 'list and not let opportunity go a-glimmering.

"My God, Jack," says he, "you can not blame me very well, for my father is drafted to the same regiment, and my brother John is a drummer in it. It is a marching regiment and certain to fight, for there be three Livingstons commanding of it, and who

knows what old Herkimer can do with his militia, or what the militia themselves can do?"

"You are perfectly right, Nick," said I in a mortified voice. "I am not envious; no! only it wounds me to feel I am so utterly forgotten, and my application for transfer unnoticed."

Nick took leave of us that night, sobered not at all by the imminence of battle, for he danced around my chamber in Burke's Inn, a-playing upon his fife and capering so that Penelope was like to suffocate with laughter, though inclined to seriousness.

We supped all together in my chamber as we had so often gathered at Summer House, but if I were inclined to gloomy brooding, and if Penelope seemed concerned at parting with a comrade, Nick permitted no sad reflexions to disturb us whom he was leaving behind.

He made us drink a very devilish flip-cup, which he had devised in the tap-room below with Jimmy Burke's aid, and which filled our young noddles with a gaiety not natural.

He sang and offered toasts, and played on his fife and capered until we were breathless with mirth.

Also, he took from his new knapsack a penny broadside,—witty, but like most broadsides of the kind, somewhat broad,—which he had for thrippence of a pedlar, the same being a parody on the Danbury Broadside; and this he read aloud to us, bursting with laughter, while standing upon his chair at table to recite it:

THE EXPEDITION TO JOHNSTOWN *

(In search of provisions)

Scene—New York City

(*Enter* General Sir Wm. Howe and Mrs. ——, preceded by Fame in cap and bells, flourishing a bladder.)

Fame (speaks)

"Without wit, without wisdom, half stupid, half drunk,
And rolling along arm-in-arm with his Punk,
Comes gallant Sir William, the warrior (by proxy)
To harangue his soldiers (held up by his Doxy)!"

Sir Wm. (speaks)

"My boys, I'm a-going to send you to Tryon,
To Johnstown, where *you'll* get as groggy as I am!
By a Tory from there I have just been informed

* A parallel to *The Expedition to Danbury*, printed in a Pennsylvania newspaper, May 14th, 1777.

That there's nobody there, so the town shall be stormed!
For if nobody's there and nobody near it,
My army shall conquer that town, never fear it!"

(*Enter* Joe Gallop-away, a refugee Tory)

Joe

"Brave soldiers, go fight that we all may get rich!"

Regular Soldiers

"We'll fetch you a halter, you * * * * !
Get out! And go live in the woods upon nuts,
Or we'll give you our bayonets plump in your guts!
Do you think we are fighting to feed such a crew
As Butler, Sir John, Mr. Singler and you?"

(*Enter* Sir John Johnson)

Sir John

"Come on, my brave boys! Now! as bold as a lion!
And march at my heels to the County called Tryon;
My lads, there's no danger, for this you should know,
That I'd let it alone if I thought it was so!
So point all your noses towards the Dominion
And we'll all live like lords is my honest opinion!"

Scene—Buck Island Trail

(*Enter* Fame, Sir John, and his Royal Greens)

Fame

"In cunning and canting, deceit and disguise,
In breaking parole by inventing cheap lies,
Sir John is a match for the worst of his species,
But in this undertaking he'll soon go to pieces.
He'll fall to the rear, for he'd rather go last,
Crying, 'Forward, my boys! Let me see you all past!
For his Majesty's service (so reads my commission)
Requires I *push* forward the whole expedition!"

Sir John

"I care not a louse for the United States,—
For General Schuyler or General Gates!
March forward, my lads, and account for each sinner,
While Butler, St. Leger, and I go to dinner.
For plenty's in Tryon of eating and drinking,
Who'd stay in New York to be starving and stinking?"

March over the Mohawk! March over, march over,
You'll live like a parcel of hogs in sweet clover!"

Scene—Outside Fort Stanwix

(A council of war. At a distance the new American flag flying above the bastions)

Sir John

"I'm sorry I'm here, for I'm horribly scared,
But how did I know that they'd all be prepared?
The fate of our forray looks darker and darker,
The state of our larder grows starker and starker,
I fear that a round-shot or one of their carkers *
May breech my new breeches like poor Peter Parker's! †
Oh, say, if my rear is uncovered, what then!—"

(*Enter* Walter Butler in a panic)

Butler

"Held! Schuyler is coming with ten thousand men!"

(A canon shot from the Fort)

Sir John (falls flat)

"I'm done! A cannon ball of thirty pound
Has hit me where Sir Peter got his wound.
I'm done! I'm all undone! So don't unbutt'n'm;
But say adieu for me to Clairette Putnam!" ‡

(*Enter* a swarm of surgeons)

Surgeons

"Compose yourself, good sir—forget your fright;
We promise you you are not slain outright.
The wound you got is not so mortal deep
But bleeding, cupping, patience, rest, and sleep,
With blisters, clysters, physic, air and diet
Will set you up again if you'll be quiet!"

Sir John

"So thick, so fast the balls and bullets flew,
Some hit me here, some there, some thro' and thro',
Beneath my legs a score of hosses fell,
Shot under me by twice as many shell;
And though my soldiers falter and beseech,

* Carkers—carcass—a shell fired from a small piece of artillery.
† Sir Peter Parker's breeches were carried away by a round shot at Fort Moultrie.
‡ His charming but abandoned mistress.

Forward I strode, defiant to the breech,
And there, as History my valour teaches,
I fell as Cæsar fell, and lost—my breeches!
His face lay in his toga, in defeat,
So let me hide my face within my seat,
My requiem the rebel cannons roar,
My duty done, my bottom very sore.
Tell Willett he may keep his flour and pork,
For I am going back to dear New York."

(Exit on a litter to the Rogue's March)"

"If we fight at Stanwix," says Penelope, "God send the business end as gaily as your broadside, Nick!"

And so, amid laughter, our last evening together came to an end, and it was time to part.

Nick gave Penelope a hearty smack, grinned broadly at me, seized my hands and whispered: "What did I tell you of the Scotch girl of Caughnawaga, who hath a way with her which is the undoing of all innocent young men?"

"Idiot!" said I fiercely, "I am not undone in such a manner!" Like two bear-cubs we clutched and wrestled; then he hugged me, laughed, and broke away.

"Farewell, comrades," he cried, snatching sack and musket from the corner. "If I can not fife the red-coats into hell to the Rogue's March, or my brother John drum them there to the Devil's tattoo, then my daddy shall persuade 'em thither with musket-music! Three stout Stoners and three lanky Livingstons, and all in the same regiment! Hurrah!"

And off and down the tavern stairs he ran, clattering and clanking, and shouting out a fond good-bye to Burke, who had forgiven him the goat.

Standing in the candle-light by the window, where a million rainwashed stars twinkled in the depthless ocean of the night, I rested my brow against the cool, glazed pane, lost in most bitter reflexion.

Penelope had gone to her chamber; behind me the dishevelled table stood, bearing the candles and the debris of our last supper; a nosegay of bright flowers—Nick's parting token—lay on the floor, where they had fallen from Penelope's bosom.

After a while I left the window and sat down, taking my head between my hands; and I had been sitting so for some time in ugly, sullen mood, when a noise caused me to look up.

Penelope stood by the door, her yellow hair about her face

and shoulders, and still combing of it while her brown eyes regarded me with an odd intentness.

"Your light still blazed from your window," she said. "I had some misgiving that you sat here brooding all alone."

I felt my face flush, for it had deeply humiliated me that she should know how I was offered no employment while others had been called or permitted to seek relief from inglorious idleness.

She flung the bright banner of her hair over her right shoulder, caressed the thick and shining tresses, and so continued combing, still watching me, her head a little on one side.

"All know you to be faithful, diligent and brave," said she. "You should not let it chafe your pride because others are called to duty before you are summoned. Often it chances that Merit paces the ante-chamber while Mediocrity is granted audience. But Opportunity redresses such accidents."

"Opportunity," I repeated sneeringly, "—where is she?—for I have not seen or heard of that soft-footed jade who, they say, comes a-knocking once in a life-time; and thereafter knocks at our door no more."

"Oh, John Drogue—John Drogue," said she in her strange and wistful way, "you shall hear the clear summons on your door very soon—all too soon for one of us,—for one of us, John Drogue."

Her brown eyes were on me, unabashed; by touch she was dividing the yellow masses of her hair into two equal parts. And now she slowly braided each to peg them for the night beneath her ruffled cap.

When she had braided and pegged her hair, she took the night-cap from her apron pocket and drew it over her golden head, tying the tabs under her chin.

"It is strange," she said with her wistful smile, "that, though the world is ending, we needs must waste in sleep a portion of what time remains to us. . . . And so I am for bed, John Drogue. . . . Lest that same tapping-jade come to your door tonight and waken me, also, with her loud knocking."

"Why do you say so? Have you news?"

"Did I not once foresee a battle in the North? And men in strange uniforms?"

"Yes," said I, smiling away the disappointment of a vague and momentary hope.

"I think that battle will happen very soon," she said gravely.

"You said that I should be there,—with that pale shadow in its shroud. Very well; only that I be given employment

and live to see at least one battle, I care not whether I meet my weird in its winding-sheet. Because any man of spirit, and not a mouse, had rather meet his end that way than sink into dissolution in aged and toothless idleness."

"If you were not a very young and untried soldier," said she, "you would not permit impatience to ravage you and sour you as it does. And for me, too, it saddens and spoils our last few days together."

"Our last few days? You speak with a certainty—an authority——"

"I know the summons is coming very soon."

"If I could but believe in your Scottish second-sight——"

"Would you be happy?"

"Happy! I should deem myself the most fortunate man on earth!—if I could believe your Scottish prophecy!"

She came nearer, and her eyes seemed depthless dusky in her pale face.

"If that is all you require for happiness, John Drogue," said she in her low, still voice, "then you may take your pleasure of it. I tell you I *know!* And we have but few hours left together, you and I."

Spite of common sense and disbelief in superstitions I could not remain entirely unconcerned before such perfect sincerity, though that she believed in her own strange gift could scarcely convince me.

"Come," said I smilingly, "it may be so. At all events, you cheer me, Penelope, and your kindness heartens me. . . . Forgive my sullen temper;—it is hard for a man to think himself ignored and perhaps despised. And my ears ache with listening for that same gentle tapping upon my door."

"I hear it now," she said under her breath.

"I hear nothing."

"Alas, no! Yet, that soft-footed maid is knocking on your door. . . . If only you had heart to hear."

"One does not hear with one's heart," said I, smiling, and stirred to plague her for her mixed metaphor.

"I do," said she, faintly.

After a little silence she turned to go; and I followed, scarce knowing why; and took her hand in the doorway.

"Little prophetess," said I, "who promises me what my heart desires, will you touch your lips to mine as a pledge that your prophecy shall come true?"

She looked back over her shoulder, and remained so, her cheek on her right shoulder.

"Your heart desires a battle, John Drogue; your idle vanity my lips. . . . But you may possess them if you will."

"I do love you dearly, Penelope Grant."

She said with a breathless little smile:

"Would you love me better if my prophecy came true this very night?"

But I was troubled at that, and had no mind to sound those unventured deeps which, at such moments, I could feel vaguely astir within me. Nor yet did I seriously consider what I truly desired of this slender maid within the circle of my arms, nor what was to come of such sudden encounters with their swift smile and oddly halting breath and the heart, surprised, rhyming rapidly and unevenly in a reckless measure which pleasured less than it embarrassed.

She loosed her hands and drew away from me, and leaned against the wall, not looking toward me.

"I think," she said in a stifled voice, "you are to have your wish this night. . . . Do you hear anything?"

In the intense stillness, straining my ears, I fancied presently that I heard a distant sound in the night. But if it had been so it died out, and the beat of my heart was louder. Then, of a sudden, I seemed to hear it again, and thought it was my pulses startled by sudden hope.

"What is that sound?" I whispered. "Do you hear it?"

"Aye."

"I hear it also. . . . Is it imagination? Is there a horse on the highway? Why, I tell you there is! . . . There *is!* Do you think he rides express?"

"Out o' the North, my lord," she whispered. And suddenly she turned, gave me a blind look, stretched out one hand.

"*Why* do you think that horseman comes for me!" I said. My imagination caught fire, flamed, and I stood shivering and crushing her fingers in my grasp. "Why—why—do you think so?" I stammered. "He's turned into William Street! He gallops this way! Damnation! He heads toward the Hall!—No! *No!* By God, he is in our street, galloping—galloping——"

Like a pistol shot came a far cry in the darkness: "Express-ho! I pass! I pass!" The racket of iron-shod hoofs echoed in the street; doors and windows flew open; a confusion of voices filled my ears; the rattling roar of the hoofs came to a clashing halt.

"Jimmy Burke's Tavern!" shouted a hoarse voice.

"Ye're there, me gay galloper!" came Burke's bantering voice. "An' phwat's afther ye that ye ride the night like a banshee? Is it Sir John that's chasin' ye crazy, Jock Gallopaway?"

"Ah-h," retorted the express, "fetch a drink for me and tell me is there a Mr. Drogue lodging here? Hey? Upstairs? Well, wait a minute——"

I still had Penelope's hand in mine as in the grip of a vise, so excited was I, when the express came stamping up the stairs in his jack-boots and pistols—a light-horseman of the Albany troop, who seemed smart enough in his mud-splashed helmet and uniform.

"You are Mr. Drogue, sir?"

"I am."

He promptly saluted, fished out a letter from his sack and offered it.

In my joy I gave him five shillings in hard money, and then, dragging Penelope by the hand, hastened to break the numerous and heavy seals and open my letter and read it by the candle's yellow flare.

"Headquarters Northern Dist:
Dept: of Tryon County.
Albany, N. Y.
August 1st, 1777.

Confidential

"To John Drogue, Esq^r,
Lieut: Rangers.
Sir,

"An Oneida runner arrived today, who gives an account that Gen^l St. Leger, with the corps of Sir John Johnson and Colonel John Butler, including a thousand savages under Joseph Brant, has been detached from the army of Gen^l Burgoyne, and is marching on Fort Schuyler.

"You are directed to take the field instantly with a scout of Oneida Indians, who await you at a rendezvous marked upon the secret map which I enclose herewith.

"You will cross the Buck Island trail somewhere between Rocky River and the Mohawk, and observe St. Leger's line of communications, cutting off such small posts as prove not too strong, taking prisoners if possible, and ascertaining St. Leger's ultimate objective, which may be Johnstown or even Schenectady.

"Having satisfied yourself concerning these matters, you will

send your despatch by a runner to Albany, and instantly move your detachment toward Saratoga, where you should come into touch with our Northern forces under General Gates, and there render a verbal report to General Gates in person.

"You are strictly cautioned to destroy this letter after reading, and to maintain absolute secrecy concerning its contents. The map you may retain, but if you are taken you should endeavour to destroy it.

"Sir, I have the honour to be, etc., etc.,

"Ph. Schuyler,
"Maj: Gen'l."

Twice I read the letter before I twisted it to a torch and burned it in the candle flame.

Then I called out to the express: "Say to the personage who sent you hither that his letter is destroyed, and his orders shall be instantly obeyed. Burke has fresh horses for those who ride express."

Off downstairs he went in his jack-boots, equipments jingling and clanking, and I unfolded my map but scarce could hold it steady in my excitement.

Immediately I perceived that I did not need the map to find the rendezvous, for, as Brent-Meester, I had known that wilderness as perfectly as I knew the streets in Johnstown.

So I made another torch of the map, laughing under my breath to think that Sir William's late forest warden should require such an article.

All this time, too, I had forgotten Penelope; and turned, now, and saw her watching me, slim and motionless and white as snow.

When her eyes met mine she strove to smile, asking me whether indeed she had not proven a true prophetess.

As she spoke, suddenly a great fear possessed me concerning her; and I stood staring at her in a terrible perplexity.

For now there seemed to be nothing for it but to leave her here, the Schenectady road already being unsafe, or so considered by Schuyler until more certain information could be obtained.

"Do you leave tonight?" she asked calmly.

"Yes, immediately."

She cast a glance at my rifle standing in the corner, and at my pack, which I had always ready in the event of such sudden summons.

Now I went over to the corner where my baggage lay, lifted

the pack and strapped it; put on powder horn, bullet pouch, and sack, slung my knife and my light war-hatchet, and took my cap and rifle.

The moment of parting was here. It scared and confused me, so swiftly had it come upon us.

As I went toward her she turned and walked to the door, and leaned against the frame awaiting me.

"If trouble comes," I muttered, "the fort is strong. . . . But I wish to God you were in Albany."

"I shall do well enough here. . . . Will you come again to Johnstown?"

"Yes. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, John Drogue."

"Will you care for Kaya?"

"Yes."

"And if I do not return you are to have all with which I die possessed. I have written it."

"In that event I keep only my memory of you. The rest I offer to the needy—in your name."

Her voice was steady, and her hand, too, where it lay passive in mine. But it crisped and caught my fingers convulsively when I kissed her; and crept up along my fringed sleeve to my shoulder-cape, and grasped the green thrums.

And now her arm lay tightly around my neck, and I looked down into the whitest face I ever had gazed upon.

"I love you dearly," I said, "and am deep in love. . . . I want you, Penelope Grant."

"I want you," she said.

My heart was suffocating me:

"Shall we exchange vows?" I managed to say.

"What vows, sir?"

"Such as engage our honour. I want you to wife, Penelope Grant."

"Dear lad! What are you saying? You should travel widely and at leisure before you commit your honour to an unconsidered vow. I desire that you first see great cities, other countries, other women—of your own caste. . . . And then . . . if you return . . . and are still of the same mind . . . concerning me . . . "

"But *you?* There are other men in the world. And I must have your vows before I go!"

"Oh, if it be only mine you desire, then I promise you, John Drogue, to look at no man with kindness in your absence, think

of no man excepting you, pray for none save only His Excellency and General Schuyler, dream of none, God willing, but you. And to remain in deed and thought and word and conduct constant and faithful to you alone."

"Then," said I, trembling, "I also promise——"

"No!"

"But I——"

"Wait! For God's sake mind what you say; for I will not have it that your honour should ever summon you hither and not your heart! No! Let be as it is."

Her sudden warmth and the quick flush of determination on her face checked and silenced me.

She said very coolly: "Any person of sense must know that a marriage is unsuitable between a servant to Douw Fonda and John Murray Drogue *Forbes,* Laird of Northesk, and a Stormont to boot!"

"Where got you that *Forbes?*" I demanded, astonished and angry.

She laughed. "Because I know the clan, *my lord!*"

"How do you know?" I repeated, astounded.

"Because it is my own clan and name. Drogue-Forbes, Grant-Forbes!—a claymore or a pair of scissors can snip the link when some Glencoe or Culloden of adversity scatters families to the four winds and seven seas. . . . Well, sir, as the saying is in Northesk, 'a Drogue stops at nothing but a Forbes. And a Grant is as stubborn.' Did you ever hear that?"

"Yes. . . . And *you* are a Forbes of Northesk?"

"Like yourself, sir, we *stop before a liaison.*"

Her rapier wit confused and amazed me; her sudden revelation of our kinship confounded me.

"Good God," said I, "why have you never told me this, Penelope?"

She shook her yellow head defiantly: "A would na," quoth she, her chin hanging down, but the brown eyes of her watching me. "And it was a servant-maid you asked to wife you, and none other either. . . . D'ye ken that, you Stormont lad? It was me—*me!*—who may wear the *Beadlaidh,* too!—me who can cry *'Lonach! Lonach! Creag Ealachaidh!'* with as stout a heart and clean a pride as you, Ian Drogue, Laird o' Northesk!—laird o' my soul and heart—my lord—my dear, dear lord——"

She flung her arms across her face and burst into a fit of weeping; and as I caught her in my arms she leaned so on my breast, sobbing out her happiness and fears and pride and love,

and her gratitude to God that I should have loved her for herself in the body of a maid-servant, and that I had bespoken her fairly where in all the land no man had offered more than that which she might take from him out of his left hand.

So, for a long while, we stood there together, clasped breast to breast, dumb with tenderness and mazed in the spell of first young love.

I stammered my vows, and she now opposed me nothing, only clinging to me the closer, confident, submissive, acquiescent in all I wished and asked and said.

There were ink, paper, a quill, and sand in her chamber. We went thither, and I wrote out drafts upon Schenectady, and composed letters of assurance and recognition, which would be useful to her in case of necessity.

I got Jimmy Burke out o' bed and shewed him all I had writ, and made him witness our signatures and engaged him to appear if necessary.

These papers and money drafts, together with Penelope's papers and letters she had of Douw Fonda and of the Patroon, were sufficient to establish her with the new will I made and had witnessed at the fort a week before.

And so, at midnight, in her little chamber at Burke's Inn, I párted from Penelope Grant,—dropped to my knee and kissed her feet, who had been servant to the county gentry and courted by the county quality, but had been mistress of none in all the world excepting only of herself.

When I was ready she handed me my rifle, buckled up my shoulder sack, smoothed my fringed cape with steady hands, walked with me to her chamber door.

Her face rested an instant against mine, but there were no tears, no trembling, only the swift passion of her lips; and then—"God be with you, John Drogue!" And so, with gay courage, closed her chamber door.

I turned and stumbled out along the corridor, carrying my rifle and feeling my way to the hand-rail, down the creaking stairway, and out into the starry night.

CHAPTER XXVII

FIRE-FLIES

THAT night I lay on my blanket in the forest, but slept only three hours, and was awake in the gates of morning before the sun rose, ready to move on to the Wood of Brakabeen, our rendezvous in Schoharie.

Never shall I forget that August day so crowded with events.

And first in the yellow flare of sun-up, on the edge of a pasture where acres of dew sparkled, I saw a young girl milking; and went to her to beg a cup of new milk.

But she was very offish until she learned to what party I belonged, and then gave me a dipper full of sweet milk.

When I had satisfied my thirst, she took me by the hand and drew me into a grove of pines where none could observe us. And here she told me her name, which was Angelica Vrooman, and warned me not to travel through Schoharie by any highway.

For, said she, the district was all smouldering with disloyalty, and the Tories growing more defiant day by day with news of Sir John's advance and McDonald also on the way from the southward to burn the place and murder all.

"My God, sir," says she, in a very passion of horror and resentment, "I know not how we, in Schoharie, shall contrive, for Herkimer has called out our regiment and they march this morning to their rendezvous with the Palatine Regiment.

"What are we to do, sir? The Middle Fort alone is defensible; the Upper and Lower Forts are still a-building, and sodders still at labour, and neither ditch nor palisade begun."

"You have your exempts," said I, troubled, "and your rangers."

"Our exempts work on the forts; our rangers are few and scattered, and Colonel Harper knows not where to turn for a runner or a rifleman!

"General Schuyler has writ to my father and says how he desires General Ten Broeck to order out the whole of the militia, only that he fears that they will behave like the Schenectady and Schoharie militia have done and that very few will march unless provision is made for their families' security.

"A man rides express today to the garrison in the Highlands to pray for two hundred Continentals. Which is only just, as we are exposed to McDonald and Sir John, and have already sent most of our men to the Continental Line, and have left only our regiment, which marches today, and the remainder all disaffected and plotting treason."

"Plotting treason? What do you mean, child?" I demanded anxiously.

"Why, sir, Captain Mann and his company refuse to march. He declares himself a friend to King George, has barricaded Brick House,* is collecting Indians and Tories, and swears he will join McDonald's outlaws and destroy us unless we lay down our arms and accept royal protection."

"Why—why the filthy dog!" I stammered, "I have never heard the like of such treason!"

"Can you help us, sir?" she asked earnestly.

"I shall endeavour to do so," said I, red with wrath.

Our people have planned to seize and barricade Stone House," said she. "My father rides express to Albany. Why, sir, so put to it are we that Henry Hager, an aged exempt of over seventy years, is scouting for our party. Is our situation not pitiful?"

"Have all the young men gone? Have you no brothers to defend this house?"

"No, sir. . . . I have a lover. . . . He is Lieutenant Wirt, of the Albany Light Horse. But he has writ to my father that he can not leave his cavalry to help us."

It was sad enough; and I promised the girl I would do what I could; and so left her, continuing on along the fences in the shadow of the woods.

It was not long afterward when I heard military music in the distance. And now, from a hill, I saw long files of muskets shining in the early sun.

It was the Canajoharie Regiment marching with fife, drum, and bugle-horn to join Herkimer; and so near they passed at the foot of the low hill where I stood that I could see and recognize their mounted officers; and saw, riding with them, Spencer, the Oneida interpreter, splendidly horsed; and Colonel Cox, old George Klock's smart son-in-law, who, when Brant asked him if he were not related to that thieving villain of the Moonlight Survey, replied: "Yes, I am, but what is that to you, you s- . . . of an Indian!"

* The house stood in the forks of the Albany and Schenectady road.

I saw and recognized Colonels Vrooman and Zielie, Majors Becker and Eckerson, and Larry Schoolcraft, the regimental adjutant; and, sitting upon their transport waggon, Dirck Larraway, Storm Becker, Jost Bouck of Clavarack, and Barent Bergen of Kinderhook.

So, in the morning sunshine, marched the 15th N. Y. Militia, carrying in its ranks the flower of the district's manhood and the principal defenders of the Schoharie Valley.

Very soberly I turned away into the woods.

For it was a strange and moving and dreadful sight I had beheld, knowing personally almost every man who was marching there toward the British fire, and aware that practically every soldier in those sturdy ranks had a brother, or father, or son, or relative of some description in the ranks of the opposing party.

Here, indeed, were the seeds of horror that civil war sprouts! For I think that only the Hager family, and perhaps the Beckers, were all mustered in our own service. But there were Tory Vroomans, Swarts, Van Dycks, Eckersons, Van Slycks—aye, even Tory Herkimers, too, which most furiously saddened our brave old General Honikol.

Well, I took to the forest as I say, but it was so thick and the travelling so wearisome, that I bore again to the left, and presently came out along the clearings and pasture fences.

Venturing now to travel the highway for a little way, and being stopped by nobody, I became more confident; and when I saw a woman washing clothes by the Schoharie Creek, I did not trouble to avoid her, but strode on.

She heard me coming, and looked up over her shoulder; and I saw she was a notorious slattern of the Valley, whose name, I think, was Staats, but who was commonly known as Rya's Pup.

"Aha!" says she, clearing the unkempt hair from her ratty face. "What is Forbes o' Culloden doing in Schoharie? Sure," says she, "there must be blood to sniff in the wind when a Northesk bloodhound comes here a-nosing northward!"

"Well, Madame Staats," said I calmly, "you appear to know more about Culloden than do I myself. Did that great loon, McDonald, tell you all these old-wives' tales?"

"Ho-ho!" says she, her two hands on her hips, a-kneeling there by the water's edge, "the McDonalds should know blood, too, when they smell it."

"You seem to be friends with that outlaw. And do you know where he now is?" I asked carelessly.

"If I do," says the slut, with an oath, "it is my own affair and

none of the Forbes or Drogues or such kittle-cattle either;—mark that, my young cockerel, and journey about your business!"

"You are not very civil, Madame Staats."

"Why, you damned rebel," says she, "would you teach me manners?"

"God forbid, madam," said I, smiling. "I'd wear gray hairs ere you learned your a-b-c."

"You'll wear no hair at all when McDonald is done with you," she cries, and bursts into laughter so shocking that I go on, shivering and sad to see in any woman such unkindness.

About noon I saw Lawyer's Tavern; and from the fences north of the house I secretly observed it for a long while before venturing thither.

John Lawyer, whatever his political complexion, welcomed me kindly and gave me dinner.

I asked news, and he gave an account that Brick House was now but a barracks full of Tories and Schoharie Indians, led by Sethen and Little David or Ogeyonda, a runner, who now took British money and wore scarlet paint.

"We in this valley know not what to do," said he, "nor dare, indeed, do aught save take protection from the stronger party, as it chances to be at the moment, and thank God we still wear our proper hair."

And, try as I might, I could not determine to which party he truly belonged, so wary was mine host and so fearful of committing himself.

The sun hung low when I came to the Wood of Brakabeen; and saw the tall forest oaks, their tops all rosy in the sunset, and the great green pines wearing their gilded spires against the evening sky.

Dusk fell as I traversed the wood, where, deep within, a cool and ferny glade runs east and west, and a small and icy stream flows through the nodding grasses of the swale, setting the wet green things and spray-drenched blossoms quivering along its banks.

And here, suddenly, in the purple dusk, three Indians rose up and barred my way. And I saw, with joy, my three Oneidas, Tahioni the Wolf, Kwiyeh the Screech-owl, Hanatoh the Water-snake, all shaven, oiled, and in their paint; and all wearing the Tortoise and The Little Red Foot.

So deeply the encounter affected me that I could scarce speak

as I pressed their extended hands, one after another, and felt their eager, caressing touch on my arms and shoulders.

"Brother," they said, "we are happy to be chosen for the scout under your command. We are contented to have you with us again.

"We were told by the Saguenay, who passed here on his way to the Little Falls, that you had recovered of your hurts, but we are glad to see for ourselves that this is so, and that our elder brother is strong and well and fit once more for the battle-trail!"

I told them I was indeed recovered, and never felt better than at that moment. I inquired warmly concerning each, and how fortune had treated them. I listened to their accounts of stealthy scouting, of ambushes in silent places, of death-duels amid the eternal dusk of shaggy forests, where sunlight never penetrated the matted roof of boughs.

They shewed me their scalps, their scars, their equipment, accoutrement, finery. They related what news was to be had of the enemy, saying that Stanwix was already invested by small advance parties of Mohawks under forester officers; that trees had been felled across Wood Creek; that the commands of Gansevoort and Willett occupied the fort on which soldiers still worked to sod the parapets.

Of McDonald, however, they knew nothing, and nothing concerning Burgoyne, but they had brazenly attended the Iroquois Federal Council, when their nation was summoned there, and saw their great men, Spencer and Skenandoa treated with cold indifference when the attitude of the Oneida nation was made clear to the Indian Department and the Six Nations.

"Then, brother," said Tahioni sadly, "our sachems covered themselves in their blankets, and Skenandoa led them from the last Onondaga fire that ever shall burn in North America."

"And we young warriors followed," added Kwiyeh, "and we walked in silence, our hands resting on our hatchets."

"The Long House is breaking in two," said the Water-snake. "In the middle it is sinking down. It sags already over Oneida Lake. The serpent that lives there shall see it settling down through the deep water to lie in ruins upon the magic sands forever."

After a decent silence Tahioni patted the Little Red Foot sewed on the breast of my hunting shirt.

"If we all are to perish," he said proudly, "they shall respect our scalps and our memory. Haih! Oneida! We young men salute our dying nation."

I lifted my hatchet in silence, then slowly sheathed it.

"Is our Little Maid of Askalege well?" I asked.

"Thiohero is well. The River-reed makes magic yonder in the swale," said Tahioni seriously.

"Is Thiohero here?" I exclaimed.

Her brother smiled: "She is a girl-warrior as well as our Oneida prophetess. Skenandoa respects and consults her. Spencer, who worships your white God and is still humble before Tharon, has said that my sister is quite a witch. All Oneidas know her to be a sorceress. She can make a pair of old moccasins jump about when she drums."

"Where is she now?"

"Yonder in the glade dancing with the fireflies."

I walked forward in the luminous dusk, surrounded by my Oneidas. And, of a sudden, in the swale ahead I saw sparks whirling up in clouds, but perceived no fire.

"Fireflies," whispered Tahioni.

And now, in the centre of the turbulent whirl of living sparks, I saw a slim and supple shape, like a boy warrior stripped for war, and dancing there all alone amid the gold and myriad greenish dots of light eddying above the swale grass.

Swaying, twisting, graceful as a thread of smoke, the little sorceress danced in a perfect whirlwind of fireflies, which made an incandescent cloud enveloping her.

And I heard her singing in a low, clear voice the song that timed the rhythm of her naked limbs and her painted body, from which the cinctured wampum-broidered sporran flew like a shower of jewels:

"Wood o' Brakabeen,
Hiahya!
Leaves, flowers, grasses green,
Dancing where you lean
Above the stream unseen,
Hiahya!
Dance, little fireflies,
Like shooting stars in winter skies;
Dance, little fireflies,
As the Oneida Dancers whirl,
Where silver clouds unfurl,
Revealing a dark Heaven
And Sisters Seven.
Hiahya! Wood o' Brakabeen!
Hiahya! Grasses green!

You shall tell me what they mean
Who ride hither,
Who 'bide thither,
Who creep unseen
In red coats and in green;
Who come this way,
Who come to slay!
Hiahya! my fireflies!
Tell me all you know
About the foe!
Where hath he hidden?
Whither hath he ridden?
Where are the Maquas in their paint,
Who have forgotten their Girl-Sainte?*
Hiahya!
I am The River-Reed!
Hiahya!
All things take heed!
Naked, without drum or mask
I do my magic task.
Fireflies, tell me what I ask! . . ."

"He-he!" chuckled The Water-snake, "Thiohero is quite a witch!"

We seated ourselves. If the Little Maid of Askalege, whirling in her dance, perceived us through her veil of living phosphorescence, she made no sign.

And it was a long time before she stood still, swayed outward, reeled across the grass, and fell face down among the ferns.

As I sprang to my feet Tahioni caught my arm.

"Remain very silent and still, my elder brother," he said gravely.

For a full hour, I think, the girl lay motionless among the ferns. The cloud of fireflies had vanished. Rarely one sparkled distantly now, far away in the glade.

The delay, in the darkness, seemed interminable before the girl stirred, raised her head, slowly sat upright.

Then she lifted one slim arm and called softly to me:

"Nai, my Captain!"

"Nai, Thiohero!" I answered.

She came creeping through the herbage and gathered herself cross-legged beside me. I took her hands warmly, and released them; and she caressed my arms and face with velvet touch.

"It is happiness to see you, my Captain," she said softly.

* Catherine. Her shrine is at Auriesville—the Lourdes of America—where many miraculous cures are effected.

"Nai! Was I not right when I foretold your hurt at the fight near the Drowned Lands?"

"Truly," said I, "you are a sorceress; and I am deeply grateful to you for your care of me when I lay wounded by Howell's house."

"I hear you. I listen attentively. I am glad," she said. "And I continue to listen for your voice, my Captain."

"Then—have you talked secretly with the fireflies?" I asked gravely.

"I have talked with them."

"And have they told you anything, little sister?"

"The fireflies say that many green-coats and Maquas have gone to Stanwix," she replied seriously, "and that other green-coats, —who now wear *red* coats,—are following from Oswego."

I nodded: "Sir John's Yorkers," I said to Tahioni.

"Also," she said, "there are with them men in *strange uniforms*, which are not American, not British."

"What!" I exclaimed, startled in spite of myself.

"Strange men in strange dress," she murmured, "who speak neither English nor French nor Iroquois nor Algonquin."

Then, all in an instant, it came to me what she meant—what Penelope had meant.

"You mean the Chasseurs from Buck Island," said I, "the Hessians!"

But she did not know, only that they wore gray and green clothing and were tall, ruddy men—taller for the odd caps they wore, and their long legs buttoned in black to the hips.

"Hessians," I repeated. "Hainault riflemen hired out to the King of England by their greedy and contemptible German master and by that great ass, George Third, shipped hither to stir in us Americans a hatred for himself that never shall be extinguished!"

"Are their scalps well haired?" inquired Tahioni anxiously.

It seemed a ludicrous thing to say, and I was put to it to stifle my sudden mirth.

"They wear pig-tails in eel-skins, and stiffened with pomade that stinks from New York to Albany," said I.

Then my mood sobered again; and I thought of Penelope's vision and wondered whether I was truly fated to meet my end in combat with these dogs of Germans.

The Screech-owl had made a fire. Also, before my arrival he had killed an August doe, and a haunch was now a-roasting and filling my nostrils with a pleasant odour.

We spread our blankets and ate our parched corn, watching our meat cooking.

"And McDonald?" I inquired of Thiohero, who sat close to me and rested her head on my shoulder while eating her parched corn.

"My fireflies tell me," said she gravely, "that the outlaws travel this way, and shall hang on the Schoharie in ambush."

"When?"

"When there is a battle near Stanwix."

"Oh. Shall McDonald come to Brakabeen?"

"Yes."

I gazed absently at the fire, slowly chewing my parched corn.

CHAPTER XXVIII

OYANEH!

THE problem which I must now solve staggered me. How was it possible, with my little scout of five, to discover McDonald's approach and also find Sir John's line of communication and penetrate his purpose?

On a leaf of my *carnet* I made a map which was shaped like an immense right-angle triangle, its apex Fort Stanwix in the west; its base Schoharie Creek; the Mohawk River its perpendicular; its hypothenuse my bee's-flight to Oneida.

The only certain information I possessed was that Sir John and St. Leger had sailed from Buck Island to Oswego, and from there were marching somewhere. I guessed, of course, that they were approaching the Mohawk by way of Oneida Lake; yet, even so, they might have detached McDonald's outlaws and sent them to Otsego; or they might be coming upon us in full force from that same direction, with flanking war parties flung out toward Stanwix to aid their strategy.

One thing, however, seemed almost certain, and that was the direction their waggons must take from Oneida Lake; for I did not think Sir John would attempt Otsego in any force after his tragic dose of a pathless wilderness the year before.

I saw very plainly, however, that I must now give up any attempt to scout for McDonald's painted demons on the Schoharie until I had discovered Sir John's objective and traced his line of communications. And I realized that I must now move quickly.

There were only two logical methods left open to me to accomplish this hazardous business with my handful of scouts. The easier way was instantly to face about, secure two good canoes at Schoharie, make directly for the Mohawk River, and follow it westward by water day and night.

But the surer way to run across Sir John's trail—and perhaps McDonald's—was to take to the western forests, follow the hypothenuse of the great triangle, and, travelling lightly and swiftly northwest, headed straight for Oneida Lake.

This was what, finally, I decided to attempt as I lay on my

blanket that night; and I was loath to leave the Schoharie and ashamed to turn tail to McDonald's ragamuffins, when the entire district was in so great distress, and Brakabeen farms a rat's nest of disloyal families.

But there seemed to be no other way to conduct if I obeyed my orders, too;—no better method of discovering McDonald and of devising punishment for him, even though in the meanwhile he should carry fire and sword through Schoharie,—perhaps menace Schenectady,—perhaps Albany itself.

No, there was no other choice; and finally I realized this, after a night passed in agonized indecision, and asking God's guidance to aid my inexperience in this so terrible a crisis.

At dawn my Indians began to paint.

After we had eaten a bowl of samp I called them around me, shewed them the map I had made in my *carnet,* told them what I had decided, and invited opinions from everybody. I added that there now was no time for any customary formalities of deliberation so dear to all Indians: I told them that Tharon and God were one; and that our ancestors understood and approved what we were about to do.

Then I laid a handful of dry sticks upon the ground, pretended that this was a fire; warmed my hands at it; lighted an imaginary pipe; puffed it and passed it around in pantomime.

Still employing symbols to reassure these young Oneida warriors concerning time-honoured formalities which they dared not disregard, I drew a circle in the air with my finger, cut it twice with an imaginary horizontal line to indicate a sunrise and a sunset, then turned to Tahioni and bade him answer my speech of *yesterday* after a *night's deliberation.*

The young warrior replied gravely that he and his comrades had consulted, and were of one mind with me. He said that it was with sorrow that they turned their backs on McDonald, who was a great villain and who surely would now be coming to Schoharie to murder and destroy; but that *it did no good to sever the tail of a snake.* He said that the fanged head of the Tory Serpent was somewhere east of Oneida Lake; that if we scouted swiftly and thoroughly in that direction we could very soon surmise where the poisonous head was about to strike, by discovering and then observing the direction in which the body of the serpent was travelling.

One by one I asked my young men for an opinion: the youthful warriors were unanimous.

Then I turned and gazed fearfully at Thiohero, knowing well

enough that these other adolescents would obey her blindly, and in dread lest her own dreams should sway her judgment and counsel her to advise us to some folly. She was their prophetess; there was nothing to do without her sanction. I could not order these Oneidas; I could only attempt to use them through their own instincts and personal loyalty to myself.

The early sun gilded the painted body of their sorceress, making of her clan ensign and the Little Red Foot two brilliant and jewelled symbols.

She stood lithely upright, one smooth knee nestling to the other, her feet in their ankle moccasins planted parallel and close together, and her body all glistening like a gold dragon-fly.

From her painted cincture hung her war-sporran,—a narrow cascade of pale blue wampum barred with scarlet and lined with winter weasel. Hatchet and knife swung from either hip; powder-horn and bullet-wallet dangled beneath her arm-pits. A war bow and a quiver full of scarlet arrows hung at her back. Her hair, shoulder-short and glossy-thick, was bound above the brows by a tight scarlet circlet. From this, across her left ear, sagged a heron's feather.

Never had I beheld such wild and supple grace in any living thing save only in a young panther clothed in the soft, dun-gold of her wedding fur.

"Thiohero," I said, "little sister to whom has been given an instinct more delicate than ours, and senses more subtle, and a wisdom both human and superhuman,—you who listen when the forest trees talk one to another under the full moon's lustre,—you who understand the speech of our lesser comrades that fly through the air paths on bright wings, or run through the dusky woodlands on four furry feet—you who speak secretly with the mighty dead; who whisper and laugh with fairies and little people and stone-throwers; who with your magic drum can make worn-out and cast-off moccasins dance; whose ancestress ate live coals to frighten away the Flying Heads; whose forefathers destroyed the Stonish Giants; *we Oneidas of the clan of the Little Red Foot* are now of one mind concerning the war-trail we ought to take and follow to the end!

"Little sister; we desire to know your opinion. *Hiero!"*

Then the Little Maid of Askalege folded her arms, looking me intently in the eyes.

"Brother, and my Captain," she said very quietly, "a year ago I told you that you should come from Howell's house *in scarlet.* And it was so.

"And while you lay at Summer House a Caughnawaga woman, with yellow hair, washed the scarlet from your body.

"And there came a day when we met under apple-trees in green fruit—this Yellow Haired woman and I. And, stopping, we confronted each the other; and looked deeply into one another's minds.

"Brother: when I discovered that Yellow Hair was in love with you I became angry. But when I discovered that this young woman also *was a sorceress,* then I became afraid.

"Brother: there was a vision in her mind, and I also beheld the scene she gazed at.

Brother: we saw a battle in the North, and men in strange uniforms, and cannon smoke. And we *both* were looking upon *you;* and upon a shape near you, which stood wrapped to the head in white garments.

"Brother: I do not know what that shape may have been which stood robed in white like a Chief of the Eight Plumed Ones.

"But at that moment we both understood—the Yellow Haired one and I—that you must surely travel to this place we gazed at.

"So it makes no difference where you decide to go; all trails lead to that appointed place; and you shall surely come there at the hour appointed, though you travel the world over and across before you shall at last arrive.

"Brother: we Oneida, of the Allied Clan of the Little Red Foot, are now of one mind with our elder brother. He is our chief and Captain. He has spoken as an Oneida to Oneidas. We understand. We thank him for his love offered. We thank him for his kinship offered. We accept; and, in our turn, we offer to our elder brother and Captain our love and our kinship. We take him among us as an Oneida.

"At this our fire—for alas! no fire shall burn again at Onondaga, nor at Oneida Lake, nor at The Wood's Edge, nor at Thendara—I, Thiohero, Sorceress of Askalege, and *Oyaneh,* salute an Oneida chief and Sachem. Hai! Royaneh!"

"Hai! Royaneh!" shouted the young warriors in rising excitement.

The girl came to me slowly, stooped and tore from the ground a strand of club-moss. Then, straightening up, she lifted her arms and held the chaplet of moss over my head,—symbol of the chief's antlers.

"O nen ti eh o ya nen ton tah ya qua wen ne ken. . . ."

Her young voice faltered, broke:

"Tah o nen sah gon yan nen tah ah tah o nen ti ton tah ken

yahtas!" she added in a strangled voice: "Now I have finished. Now show me the *man!*"

"He is here!" cried the excited Oneidas. "He wears the antlers!"

Tahioni stretched out his hand; it was trembling when he touched the red foot sewed on my hunting shirt.

"What is his name, O Thiohero, whom you have raised up among the Oneida? Who mourn a great man dead?"

A deep silence fell among them; for what their prophetess had done meant that she must have knowledge that a great man and chief among the Oneida lay dead somewhere at that very moment.

Slowly the girl turned her head from one to another; a veiled look drowned her gaze; the young men were quivering in the imminence of a revelation based upon knowledge which could be explained only by sorcery.

Then the Little Maid of Askalege took a dry stick from the pretended fire, crumbled it, touched her lips with the powder in sign of personal and intimate mourning.

"Spencer, Interpreter and Oneida Chief, shall die this week in battle," she said in a dull voice.

A murmur of horror and rage, instantly checked and suppressed, left the Oneidas staring at their prophetess.

"Therefore," she whispered, "I acquaint you that we have chosen this young man to take his place; we lift the antlers; we give him the same name,—Hahyion!" *

"Haih! Hahyion!" shouted the Oneidas with upflung hands.

I was dumb. I could not speak. I dared not ask this girl why and by what knowledge she presumed to predict the death of Spencer, and to raise me up in his place and give me the same name.

In spite of me her magic made me shudder.

But now that I was truly an Oneida, and in absolute authority I must act quickly.

"Come, then," said I in a shaky voice, "we People of the Rock must march on the Gates of Sunset. If my fate lies there, why then I am due to die in that place! . . . Make ready, Oneidas!"

The Screech-owl found a hollow under a windfall; and here we hurriedly hid our heavier baggage.

Then, when all had completed painting the Little Red Foot on their bellies, I stepped swiftly ahead of them and turned northwest.

"March," I said in a low voice.

* Haghriron, of the Great Rite, in the Canienga dialect.

We travelled as the honey-bee flies, and as rapidly while the going was good en route; but to cover this great triangle of forests we were obliged to use the tactics of hunting wolves and, from some given point, circle the surrounding country, in hopes of cutting the hidden British trail we sought.

This delayed us; but it was the only way. And, like trained hunting dogs, we even quartered and cut up the wilderness, halting and encircling Cherry Valley on the second day out, because I knew how familiar was Walter Butler with that region and with the people who inhabited it, and suspected that he might be likely to lead his first attack over ground he knew so well.

Ah, God!—had I known then what all the world knows now! And I erred only in guessing at the time of Cherry Valley's martyrdom, not in estimating the ferocious purpose of young Walter Butler.

On the afternoon of our second day out from Schoharie, while we were still beating up the bush of the Cherry Valley district, I left my Indians and went alone down into the pretty settlement in quest of information and also to renew our scanty stock of provisions. I found the lovely place almost deserted, save for a few old men of the exempts working on a sort of fort around Colonel Clyde's house, and a few women and children who had not yet gone off to Schenectady or Albany.

I stopped at the house of the Wells family. John Wells, the father of my friend Bob, had been one of the Judges of the Tryon County courts, sitting on the bench with old John Butler, who now was invading us, with Sir John, in arms.

Bob was away on military duty, but there were in the house his mother, his wife, his four little children, his brother Jack, and Janet, his engaging sister whom I had admired so often at the Hall, and who was beloved like a daughter by Sir William.

I shall never forget the amazement of these delightful and kindly people when I appeared at their door in Cherry Valley, nor their affectionate hospitality when they learned my purpose and my errand.

A sack of provisions was immediately provided me; their kindness and courtesy seemed inexhaustible, although even now the shadow of terror lay over Cherry Valley. Their young men under Colonels Clyde and Campbell had gone to join Herkimer; they were utterly destitute of defense against McDonald or Sir John if Schoharie were invaded, or if Stanwix fell, or if Herkimer gave way before St. Leger.

They asked news of me very calmly, and I told them all I had learned and something of the sinister rumours which now were current in the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys.

They, in their turn, knew nothing positive of Sir John, but had heard that he was marching on Stanwix with St. Leger and Brant, and that a thousand savages were with them.

My sojourn at the Wells house was brief; the family was evidently very anxious but not gloomy; even the children smiled courageously when I made my adieux; and my dear little friend, Janet, led me by the hand to the edge of the brush-field, through which I must travel to regain the forest, and kissed me at our parting.

On the wood's edge, I paused and looked back at the place called Cherry Valley, lying so peacefully in the sunshine, where in the fields grain already was turning golden green; and fat cattle grazed their pastures; and wisps of smoke drifted from every chimney.

That is my memory of Cherry Valley in the sunny tranquillity of late afternoon, where tasseled corn like ranks of plumed Indians, covered vale and hillock; and clover and English grass grew green again after the first haying; and on some orchard trees the summer apples glimmered rosy ripe or lush gold among the leaves;—ah, God!—if I could have known what another year was to bring to Cherry Valley!

There was no sound in the still settlement except a dull and distant stirring made by the workmen sodding parapets on the new and unfinished fort.

From where I stood I could see the Wells house, and the little children at play in the dooryard; and Peter Smith, a servant, drawing water, who one day was to see his master's family in their blood.

I could make out Colonel Campbell's house, too, and the chimney of Colonel Clyde's house; and had a far glimpse of the residence of the Reverend Mr. Dunlop, the aged minister of Cherry Valley.

From a gilded weather-cock I was able to guess about where Captain M'Kean should reside; and Mr. Mitchell's barn I discovered, also. But M'Kean and his rangers must now be marching with Herkimer's five regiments to meet the hordes of St. Leger.

The sun sank blood-red behind the unbroken forests, and the sky over Cherry Valley seemed to be all afire as I turned away and entered the twilight of the woods, lugging my sack of provisions on my back.

That night my Indians and I lay within rifle-shot of the Mohawk River; and at dawn we made a crow-flight of it toward Oneida Lake; and found not a trace of Sir John or of anybody in that trackless wilderness; and so camped at last, exhausted and discouraged.

On the fourth day, toward sunset, the Screech-owl, roaming far out on our western flank, returned with news of a dead and stinking fire in the woods, and fish heads rotting in it; and he thought the last ember burnt out some four days since.

He took us to it in the dark, and his was a better woodcraft than I could boast, who had been Brent-Meester, too. At dawn we examined the ashes, but discovered nothing; and we were eating our parched corn and discussing the matter of the fire when, very far away in the west, a shot sounded; and in that same second we were on our feet and listening like damned men for the last trumpet.

My heart made a deadened rataplan like a muffled drum, and seemed to deafen me, so terribly intent was I.

Tahioni stretched out like a panther sunning on a log; and laid his ear flat against the earth. Seconds grew to minutes; nobody stirred; no other sound came from the westward.

Presently I turned and signalled in silence; my Indians crawled noiselessly to their allotted intervals, extending our line north and south; then, trailing my rifle, I stole forward through an open forest, beneath the ancient and enormous trees of which no underbrush grew in the eternal twilight.

Nothing stirred. There were no animals here, no birds, no living creature that I could hear or see,—not even an insect.

Under our tread the mat of moist dead leaves gave back no sound; the silence in this dim place was absolute.

We had been creeping forward for more than an hour, I think, before I discovered the first sign of man in that spectral region.

I was breasting a small hillock set with tall walnut trees, in hopes of obtaining a better view ahead, and had just reached the crest, and, lying flat, was lifting my head for a cautious survey, when my eye caught a long, wide streak of sunlight ahead.

My Indians, too, had seen this tell-tale evidence which indicated either a stream or a road. But we all knew it was a road. We could see the sunshine dappling it; and we crawled toward it, belly dragging, like tree-cats stalking a dappled fawn.

Scarce had we come near enough to observe this road plainly, and the crushed ferns and swale grasses in the new waggon ruts, when we heard horses coming at a great distance.

Down we drop, each to a tree, and lie with levelled pieces, while slop! thud! clink! come the horses, nearer, nearer; and, to my astonishment and perplexity, from the *east,* and travelling the wrong way.

I cautioned my Oneidas fiercely against firing unless I so signalled them; we lay waiting in an excitement well nigh unendurable, while nearer and nearer came the leisurely sound of the advancing horses.

And now we saw them!—three red-coat dragoons riding very carelessly westward on this wide, well-trodden road which now I knew must lead to Oneida Lake.

I could see the British horsemen plainly. The day was hot; the sun beat down on their red jackets and helmets; they sat their saddles wearily; their faces were wet with perspiration, and they had loosened jacket and neck-cloth, and their pistols were in holster, and their guns slung upon their backs.

It was plain that these troopers had no thought of precaution nor entertained any apprehension of danger on this road, which must lie in the rear of their army, and must also be their route of communication between the Lake and the Mohawk.

Slap, slop, clink! they trampled past us where my Oneidas lay a-tremble like crouched cats to see the rats escaping on their runway.

But my ears had caught another sound,—the distant noise of wheels; and I guessed that this was a waggon which the three horsemen should have escorted, but, feeling entirely secure, had let their horses take their own gait, and so had straggled on far ahead of the convoy with which they should have kept in touch.

The waggon was far away. It approached slowly. Already the horsemen had ridden clear out o' sight; and we crept to the edge of the road and lay flat in the weeds, waiting, listening.

Twice the approaching vehicle halted as though to rest the horses; the dragoons must have been a long way ahead by this time, for it was some minutes since the sound of their horses' hoofs had died away in the woods.

And now, near and ever nearer, creeps the waggon; and now it seems close at hand; and now we see it far away down the road, slowly moving toward us.

But it is no baggage-wain,—no transport cart that approaches us. The two horses are caparisoned in bright harness; the driver wears a red waistcoat and is a negro, and powdered. The vehicle is a private coach which lurches, though driven cautiously.

"Good God!" said I, "that is Sir John's family coach! Tahioni,

hold your Oneidas! For I mean to find out who rides so carelessly to Oneida Lake, confiding too much in the army which has passed this way!"

Slowly, slowly the coach drew near our ambush. I recognized Colas as the coachman *pro tem;* I knew the horses and the family coach; saw the Johnson arms emblazoned on the panels as I rose from the roadside weeds.

"Colas!" I said quietly.

The negro pulled in his horses and sat staring at me, astounded.

I walked leisurely past the horses to the window of the coach. And there, seated, I saw Polly Johnson and Claudia Swift.

There ensued a terrible silence and they gazed upon me as though they were looking upon a dead man.

"Jack Drogue!" whispered Claudia, "how—how come you here?"

I bowed, my cap in my hand, but could not utter a word.

"Jack! Jack, are—are you alone?" faltered Lady Johnson. "Good heavens, what does this mean, I beg of you?——"

"Where are your people, Polly?" I asked in a dead voice.

"My—my people? Do you mean my husband?"

"I mean him. . . . And his troops. Where are they at this moment?"

"Do you not know that the army is before Stanwix?"

"I know it now," said I gravely.

"Mercy on us, Jack!" cried Claudia, finding her voice shrilly; "will you not tell us how it is that we meet you here on the Oneida road and close to our own army?"

I shook my head: "No, Claudia, I shall not tell you. But I must ask you how you came here and whither you now are bound. And you must answer."

They gazed at my sombre face with an intentness and anxiety that made me sadder than ever I was in all my life.

Then, without a word, Lady Johnson laid aside the silken flap of her red foot-mantle. And there my shocked eyes beheld a new born baby nursing at her breast.

"We accompanied my husband from Buck Island to Oswego," she said tremulously. "And, as the way was deemed so utterly secure, we took boat at Oneida Lake and brought our horses. . . . And now are returning—never dreaming of danger from—from your people—Jack."

I stared at the child; I stared at her.

"In God's name," I said, "get forward then, and hail your horsemen escort. Say to them that the road is dangerous! Take

to your batteau and get you to Oswego as soon as may be. And I strictly enjoin you, come not this way again, for there is now no safety in Tryon for man or woman or child, nor like to be while red-coat or green remains within this new-born nation!

"And you, Claudia, say to Sir Frederick Haldimand that he has lighted in Tryon a flame that shall utterly consume him though he hide behind the ramparts of Quebec itself! Say that to him!"

Then I stepped back and bade Colas drive on as fast as he dare. And when he cracked his long whip, I stood uncovered and looked upon the woman I once had loved, and upon the other woman who had been my childhood playmate; and saw her child at her breast, and her pale face bowed above it.

And so out of my life passed these two women forever, without any word or sign save for the white faces of them and the deadly fear in their eyes.

I stood there in the Oneida Road, watching their coach rolling and swaying until it was out of view, and even the noise of it had utterly died away.

Then I walked slowly back to the wood's edge; in silence my Oneidas rose from the weeds and stood around me where I halted, the sleeve of my buckskin shirt across my eyes.

Then, when I was ready, I turned and went forward, swiftly, in a southeasterly direction; and heard their padded footsteps falling lightly at my heels as I hastened toward the Mohawk, a miserable, sad, yet angry man.

All that long, hot day we travelled; and in the afternoon black clouds hid the sun, and presently a most furious thunder storm burst on us in the woods, so that we were obliged to shelter us under the hemlocks and lie there while rain roared and lightning blinded, and deafening thunder shook the ground we lay on.

It was over in an hour. The forest dripped and steamed as we unwrapped our rifles and started on.

Twice, it seemed to me, far to the east I heard a duller, vaguer noise of thunder; and my Indians also noticed it.

Later, with the sky all blue above, it came again—dull, distant shocks with no rolling echo trailing after.

Tahioni came to me, and I saw in his uneasy eyes what I also now divined. For to the bravest Indian the sound of cannon is a terror and an abomination. And I now had become very sure that it was cannon we heard; for Stanwix lay far across the wil-

derness in that direction, and the heavy, lifeless, and superheated air might carry the solemn sound from a great distance.

But I said nothing, not choosing to share my conclusions with these young warriors who, though they had taken scalps at Big Eddy, were yet scarcely tried in war.

That night we lay near an old trail which I knew ran to Otsego and passed by Colonel Croghan's new house.

And on this trail, early the following morning, we encountered two men whom my Indians, instead of taking as they should have done, instantly shot down. Which betrayed their inexperience in war; and I rated them roundly.

The two dead men were *blue-eyed* Indians in all the horror of their shameful paint and forest dress.

I knew one of them, for when Tahioni washed their lifeless visages and laid them on their backs, there, to my hot indignation, I beheld young Thomas Hare, brother to Lieutenant Henry Hare and to Captain James Hare, of the Indian Service.

Horror-stricken, bitterly mortified, I gazed down at the dead features of these two renegades who had betrayed their own race and colour; and my Indians, watching me, understood when I turned and spat upon the ground; and so they scalped both—which otherwise they had not dared in my presence.

We found on them every evidence that they were serving as a scout for McDonald. Probably when we encountered them they had been on their way to Sir John at Stanwix with verbal intelligence. But now it was idle to surmise what they might have been able to tell us.

We found upon their bodies no papers to shew where McDonald might be lurking; and so, as I would not trouble to bury the carrion, my Oneidas despoiled them, hid their weapons, pouched their money and ammunition, and left them lying on the trail for their more respectable relatives, the wolves, to devour.

Now, on the Otsego trail, which was but a vile one and nigh impassable with undergrowth, we beat toward the Mohawk like circling hounds cast out and at fault to find a scent.

And at evening of that day, the seventh of August, I saw a man in the woods, and, watching, ordered my Indians to surround him and bring him in alive.

Judge, then, of my chagrin when presently comes walking up, and arm in arm with my Oneidas, one Daniel Wemple in his militia regimentals, a Torloch farmer whom I knew.

"Great God, John!" says he, "what are you doing here with your tame panthers and a pair o' raw scalps that smell white in my nostrils?"

I told him, and asked in turn for news.

"You know nothing?" he demanded.

"Nothing, Dan, only that we heard cannon to the eastward yesterday."

"Well," says he, "there has been a bloody fight at Oriska, John; and Tryon must mourn her sons.

"For our fine regiments marched into an ambuscade on our way to drive Sir John from Stanwix, which he had invested. Colonel Cox is dead, and Majors Eisinlord and Klepsattle and Van Slyck. Colonel Paris is taken, and our brigade surgeon, Younglove, and Captain Martin of the batteaux service. John Frey, Major of brigade, is missing, and so is Colonel Bellinger. Scarce an inferior officer but is slain or taken; our dead soldiers are carted off by waggon-loads; our wounded lie in their alder-litters. And among them our general,—old Honikol Herkimer! —and I myself saw that brave Oneida die—our interpreter, Spencer——"

A cry escaped me, instantly checked as I looked at Thiohero. The girl came and rested her arm on my left shoulder and gazed steadily at the militia man.

He passed his hand wearily through his hair: "Only one regiment ran," he said dully. "I shall not name it to you because it was not entirely their fault; and afterward they lost heavily and fought bravely. But this is a dreadful blow to Tryon, John Drogue."

"We were routed, then?"

"No. We drove them from the field pell mell! We cut Brant's savages to pieces. We went at Sir John's Greens with our bayonets and tore the guts out of them! We put the fear o' God into Butler's green-coats, too, and there'll be caterwauling in Canada when the news is carried, for I saw young Stephen Watts * dead in his blood, and Hare running off with a broken arm a-flapping and he a-screaming like a singed wildcat——"

"Steve Watts! Dead!"

"I saw him. I saw one of our soldiers take his watch from his body. God! What a shambles was there at Oriska!"

But I was thinking of young Stevie Watts, Polly Johnson's brother, and my one-time friend, lying dead in his blood. And

* Captain Watts was left for dead but ultimately recovered.

I thought of his boyish passion for Penelope. And her kindness for him. And remembered how last I had seen him. . . . And now he lay dead; and I had seen his sister but a few hours ago —seen her for the last time I should ever behold her.

I drew a breath like a deep and painful sigh.

"And the Fort?" I asked in a low voice.

"Stanwix holds fast, John Drogue. Willet is there, and Gansvoort with the 3rd New York of the Line."

"Have you news of McDonald, Dan?"

"None."

"Whither do you travel express?"

"To Johnstown with the news if I can get there."

I warned him concerning conditions in Schoharie. We shook hands, and I watched the brave militia man stride away through the forest all alone.

When we camped that night, Thiohero touched her brow and breasts with ashes from our fire. That was her formal symbol of mourning for Spencer. Later we all should mourn him in due ceremony.

Then she came and lay down close against me and rested her child's face on my hollow'd arm. And so slept all night long, trembling in her dreams.

I know not how it chanced that I erred in my scouting and lost direction, but on the tenth day of August my Indians and I came out into a grassy place where trees grew thinly.

The first thing I saw was an Indian, hanging by the heels from a tree, and lashed there with the traces from a harness.

At the same time one of my Oneidas discovered a white man lying with his feet in a pool of water. But when Tahioni drew the cocked hat from his head to see his countenance, hair and skin stuck to it, and a most horrid smell filled the woods.

And now, everywhere, we beheld evidences of the Oriska combat, for here lay a soldier's empty knapsack, and yonder a ragged shirt, and there a rusting tin cup, and here a boot all bloody and slit to the toe.

And now, looking about me, I suddenly comprehended that we were nearer to Stanwix Fort than to Oriska; and had no business any nearer to either place.

We now were in a most perilous region and must proceed with every caution, for in this forest Brant's Iroquois must be roaming everywhere in the rear of the troops which had invested Stanwix.

My Oneidas understood this without explanation from me; and

they and I also became further alarmed when, to our astonishment, we came upon a broad road running through a forest where I swear no road had existed a twelve-month past.

Where this road led, and from whence, neither my Oneidas nor I knew. It was a raw and new road, yet it had been heavily travelled both ways by horse, foot, and waggons. It seemed to have as many windings as the Kennyetto at Fonda's Bush; and I saw it had been builded to run clear of hills and swampy land, as though made for a traffic heavier than a log road might easily sustain.

We left the road but scouted eastward along its edge, I desiring to learn more of it; for it seemed to bear toward Wood Creek; and if there were enemy batteaux to be seen I wished to count them.

Suddenly Thiohero touched my arm,—caught my sleeve convulsively.

"Hahyion—Royaneh—my elder brother—O my white Captain!" she stammered, clinging to me in her excitement, "here is the *place!* Here is the place I saw in my vision! Here I saw strange uniforms and cannon smoke—and a strange white shape —and you—O Hahyion—my Captain!——"

I looked around me, suddenly chilled and shivering in spite of the heat of a summer afternoon. But I perceived nobody except my Oneidas. We were on a long, sparsely-wooded hillock where juniper spread waist high. Below I could see the new road curving sharply to the eastward. But nobody moved down there: there was not a sound to be heard, not a movement in the forest. All around us was still as death.

Something about the abrupt bend in the empty road below me attracted my attention. I examined it intently for a while, then, cautioning my Indians, I ventured to move forward and around the south slope of the hillock, wading waist-deep in juniper, in order to get a look at what might lie behind the bend in this road of mystery.

The road appeared to end abruptly just around the curve, as though it had been opened only so far and then abandoned. This first amazed me and then alarmed me, because I knew it could not be so as I had seen on the roadbed evidences of recent and heavy travel.

I stood peering down at it where it seemed to stop short against the green and tangled barrier of the woods which blocked it like a living abattis——

God! It *was* an abattis!—a mask!

As I realized this I saw a man in a strange, outlandish uniform run out from the green and living barrier, look up at me where I stood in the juniper, shout out something *in German,* and stand pointing up at me while a score of soldiers, all in this same outlandish uniform, swarmed out upon the road and started running toward where I stood.

Then I came to my senses, clapped my rifle to my cheek and fired, stopping one of these strange soldiers and curing him of his running habits forever.

To me arrived swiftly my Oneidas, and dropped in the juniper, kneeling and firing upon the soldiers below. Two among them fell down flat on the road, and then the others turned and fled straight into their green barrier of branches. From there they fired at us wildly, keeping up a strange, hoarse shouting.

"Hessian chasseurs!" I exclaimed. "These troops can be no other than the filthy Germans hired by King George to come here and cut our throats!"

"Those men wear the uniform I saw in my vision of this place!" whispered Thiohero, quietly reloading her rifle. "I think that this is truly your battle, my Captain."

Then, as her prophecy of cannon came into my mind, there was a blinding flash from that green barrier below; a vast cloud blotted it from view; the pine beside which I stood shivered as though thunder-smitten; and the entire top of it crashed down upon us, burying us all in lashing, writhing branches.

So stunned and stupefied was I that I lay for an instant without motion, my ears still deafened by that clap of thunder.

But now I floundered to my feet amid the pine-top's débris; around me rose my terrified Oneidas, nearly paralyzed with fright.

"Come," said I, "we should pull foot ere they blow us into pieces with their damned artillery. Thiohero, where are you?"

"I come, Royaneh!"

"Tahioni! Kwiyeh! Hanatoh!" I called anxiously.

Then I saw them all creeping like weasels from under the green débris.

"Hasten," I muttered, "for we shall have all the Iroquois in North America on our backs in another moment."

As we started to retreat, the Germans emptied their muskets after us; but I did not think anybody had been hit.

We now were running in single file, our rifles a-trail, Tahioni leading, and I some distance in the rear, turning my head over my shoulder from moment to moment to see if we were followed.

And now, as I ran on, I understood that this accursed road had been made expressly to transport their siege artillery; that their guns were still in transit; that they had masked a cannon and manned it with Hessian chasseurs to keep their gun-road safe against surprise from any party scouting out of Oriska.

Lord, what an ambuscade! And what an escape for us!

As I jogged on at the heels of my Indians, still dazed and shaken by the deadly surprise of it all, I saw Thiohero, who was some little distance in front of me, reel sideways as though out o' breath, and stand still near a beech tree, holding her scarlet blanket against her body.

When I came up to her she was leaning against the tree, clutching her blanket to her face and breast with both hands. But she heard me and lifted her head from the gaily coloured folds.

"Hahyion—Royaneh!" she panted, *"this* was your battle. . . . And now—it is over . . . and you shall live! . . ."

My Oneidas had halted and were looking back at us. And now they returned rapidly and clustered around us.

"Are you exhausted, little sister?" I demanded, drawing nearer. "Are you hurt——"

"Listen—my brother and—my Captain!" she burst out breathlessly. *"This* was the battle of my vision!—the strange uniforms—the cannon-cloud—the white shape! . . . I saw it near you where—where you stood in the cannon smoke!—a shape like mist at sunrise. . . . Haihee! It was the face and shape of the Caughnawaga girl! . . . It was Yellow Hair who floated there beside you in the cannon smoke!—covered to her eyes in white and flowers——"

The Little Maid of Askalege clutched her gay blanket closer to her breast and began to sway gently on her feet as though the thumping of a distant partridge were a witch-drum.

"Haihya Hahyion!" she whispered—"Thiohero Oyaneh salutes—her Captain. . . . I speak—as one dying. . . . Haiee! Haie—e! Yellow Hair is—is quite—a witch!——"

Her voice failed; down on her knees she sank. And, as I snatched her from the ground and lifted her, she looked up into my face and smiled. Then, in a long-drawn sigh, her soul escaped between my arms that could not stay its flight to Tharon.

Her face became as wax; her head fell forward on my breast; her eyes rolled upward. And, as I pressed her in my arms, all my body grew warm and wet with bright blood pouring from her softly parted lips.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WOOD OF BRAKABEEN

IT was the 12th day of August when we came again to the Wood of Brakabeen,—we four young warriors of the clan of the Little Red Foot.

We were ragged and bruised and weary, and starving; but the fierce rage burning in our breasts gave to each a strength and purpose that nerved our briar-torn and battered bodies to effort inexhaustible.

Under scattered and furtive shots from German muskets we had retreated through the forest with our dead prophetess, until night ended pursuit by the chasseurs, and we ourselves had lost our direction.

All the next day we travelled southwest with our dead. On the tenth day we came out on Otsego Lake, near to Croghan's new house.

Where he had cleared the bush and where Indian grass was growing as tall as a man's head, we made a deep grave. And here we four clansmen buried the Little Maid of Askalege; and sodded the mound with wild grasses where strawberries grew, and blue asters and plumes of golden-rod.

A Canada whitethroat called sweetly, sadly, from the forest in the sunset glow. We made for the grave a white cross of silver birch. We placed parched corn and a cup of water at the foot of the cross; and her bow and scarlet arrows against her needs where deer, God willing, should be plenty. And near these we set her little moccasins lest in that unknown land her tender feet should suffer on the trail.

In the morning we made a fire of ozier, sweet-birch, cherry wood, and samphire.

When the aromatic smoke blew over us I rose and spoke. After I had finished, the others in turn rose and spoke their mind, saying very simply what was in their hearts concerning their little prophetess, who had died wearing a little red foot painted on her body.

So we left her at rest under the wild flowers and Indian grass, near to Croghan's empty house, with a vast wilderness around to guard the sanctuary, and the sad whitethroats to mourn her.

And now, fierce and starved and ragged, we came once more to the Wood of Brakabeen. And heard McDonald's guns in the valley and his pibroch on the hills.

The afternoon was still and hot, the deep blue sky cloudless. Over Vrooman's Land a brown smoke hung; more smoke was rising above Clyberg; more rolled up beyond the swampy ground near the Flockey.

From the edge of Brakabeen Wood, looking out over the valley, we could hear firing in the direction of Stone House, more musketry toward Fox Creek.

"McDonald is in Schoharie," I said to Tahioni. "There will be many dead here, women and children and the grey-haired. Are my brothers of the Little Red Foot too weary to strike?"

The young Oneida warrior laughed. I looked at my ragged comrades where they crouched in their frightful paint, listening excitedly to the distant firing, and I saw their lean cheeks twitching and their nostrils a-flare as they scented the distant fighting.

The wild screaming of the pibroch, too, seemed to madden them; and it enraged me, also, because I saw that Sir John's Highlanders were here with McDonald's fantastic crew and had come to slaughter us all with their dirks and broadswords as they had threatened before Sir John fled North.

We turned to the left and I led my Oneidas in a file through the ferny glades of Brakabeen Wood, and amid still places where clear streams ran deep in greenest moss; where tall lilies nodded their yellow Chinese caps in the flowery swale; where, in the demi-light of forest aisles, nothing grew save the great trees bedded there since the dawn of time, which sprung their vast arches high above us to support their glowing tapestry of leaves.

It was mid-afternoon when, smelling hot smoke, we came near the woods by the river; and saw, close to us, a barn afire, and three men carrying guns, running hither and thither in a hay field and setting every stack aflame with their torches.

One o' the fellows was a drummer in the green uniform of Butler's Rangers, and his drum was slung on his back. And I knew him. He was Michael Reed of Fonda's Bush, and cousin to Nick Stoner.

And then, to my astonishment and rage, I saw Dries Bowman in his farmer's clothes; and the other man was a huge German —one of their chasseurs, who wore a stiff pig-tail that was greased, and a black mustache, and waist-high spatterdashes—a very barbarian in red and blue and green; and grunting and puffing as he ran about in the hot sunshine to set the hay-cocks afire with his torch.

I remember giving no command; we sprang out of the woods, trailing our rifles in our left hands; and Bowman fired at me and, missing, started to run; but I got him by his collar and knocked him over with my gun-butt.

The Hessian chasseur instantly drew up and fired in our direction; and Tahioni shot him dead in his tracks, where he fell heavily on his back and lay in the grass with limbs outspread.

"You may take his scalp! I care not!" shouted I, watching my Oneidas, who had got at Micky Reed and were striving to take him alive as I had ordered.

But Reed had a big dragoon's pistol in his belt and would have used it had not Kwiyeh killed him swiftly with his hatchet.

But I would not permit them to take Reed's scalp, and bade them despoil the body quickly and bring the leather cross-belts and girdle to me.

Hanatoh ran up and caught Dries Bowman by the collar; and we jerked him to his feet and dragged and hustled him into the woods. And here despoiled him, pulling from his pockets a Royal Protection and a bundle of papers, which revealed him as a spy sent down to preach treason in Schoharie and carry what men he might corrupt as recruits to McDonald and Sir John.

"That's enough to hang him!" I said sharply to Tahioni. "Link me up those drummer's cross-belts!"

"What—what do you mean, John Drogue!" stammered the wretch. "Would you murder an old neighbour?"

"That same old neighbour would have murdered me at Howell's house. And now is come disguised in civilian clothing to Schoharie with a spy's commission, to raise the district in arms against us."

"My God!" he shrieked, as Tahioni flung the leather halter about his neck, "is it a crime if honest men stand by their King?"

"Not when they stand out in plain day and wear a red coat or a green," said I, flinging the leather halter over the oak tree's limb.

Hanatoh swiftly pinioned his arms and tied his wrists; I tossed the halter's end to Kwiyeh. Tahioni also took hold of it.

"Hoist that spy!" I said coldly. And in a second more his feet were kicking some half dozen inches above the ground.

My Oneidas fastened the halter to a stout bush; I was shaking all over and felt sick and dizzy to hear him raling and choking in the leather noose which was too stiff for the ghastly business.

But at that instant Tahioni shouted a shrill warning; I looked over my shoulder and saw a great number of soldiers wearing red patches on their hats, running across the burning hayfield to surround us.

Yet it needed better men than McDonald's to take me and my Oneidas in Brakabeen Wood. We turned and plunged into the bush, leaving the wretched spy* hanging to the oak, his convulsed body now spinning dizzily round and round above the ground.

Looking back as I ran, I soon saw that the men who were chasing us had little stomach for a pursuit which must presently lead to bush-fighting. They shouted and halooed, but lagged as they arrived at the denser woods; and they seemed to have no officers to encourage them, or if they indeed possessed any I saw none.

Tahioni came fiercely to me, where I had halted, to watch the red-patch soldiers, saying that we had now been out thirteen days and had taken but three scalps. He said that to hang a man was not a proper vengeance to atone the death of Thiohero; and wanted to know why my prisoners should not be delivered to him and his Oneida comrades, who knew how to punish their enemies.

Which speech so angered me that I had a mind to take him by the throat. Only the sudden memory of our Red Foot clanship, and of Thiohero, deterred me. Also, that was no way to treat any Indian; and to lose my self-control was to lose the Oneidas' respect and my authority over them.

"My brother, Tahioni," said I coldly, "should not forget that he is my *younger* brother.

"If Tahioni were older, and possessed of more wisdom and

* The historian, J. R. Simms, says that Benjamin De Luysnes and his party strung up Dries Bowman, and then cut him down and let him go with a warning. Simms also gives a different date to this affair. At all events, it seems that Bowman was cut down in time to save his life. Simms, by the way, spells De Luysnes' name De Line. Campbell mentions Captain Stephen Watts as Major Stephen Watson. We all commit error.

experience, he would know that unless a chief asks opinions none should be offered."

The youth's eyes flashed at me and he stiffened under a rebuke that is hard for any Iroquois to swallow.

"My younger brother," said I, "ought to know that I am not like an officer of Guy Johnson's Indian Department, who delivers prisoners to the Mohawks. I deliver no prisoner to any Indian. I obey my orders, and expect my Indians to obey mine. They are free always to take Indian scalps. The scalps of white men they take only if permitted by me."

Tahioni hung his head, the Screech-owl and the Water-snake nodded emphatic assent.

"Yonder," said I, "are the red-patch soldiers. They are Tory marauders and outlaws. If you can ambush and cut off any of them, do so. And I care not if you scalp them, either. But if any are taken I shall not deliver them to any Oneida fire. No prisoner of this flying scout shall burn."

The Water-snake twitched my sleeve timidly.

"Hahyion," he said, "we obey. But an Iroquois prefers the fire and torment to the noose. Because he can sing his death songs and laugh at his enemies through the flames. But what man can sing or boast when a rope chokes his speech in his throat?"

I scarcely heeded him, for I was watching the red-patch soldiers, who now were leaving the woods and crossing the hayfield, which still was smoking where the fire made velvet-black patches in the dry grass.

The barn had fallen in and was only a great heap of glowing coals, over which a pale flame played in the late afternoon sunshine.

Listening and looking after the red-patches, I heard very distinctly the sound of guns in the direction of Stone House.

Now, while it was none of my business to hang on McDonald's flanks for prisoners and scalps, it *was* my business to observe him and what he might be about in Schoharie; and to carry this news to Saratoga by way of Johnstown, along with my budget concerning Stanwix and St. Leger.

Besides, Stone House lay on my way. So I signalled my Indians and started west. And it was not very long before we came upon two Schoharie militia-men whom I knew, Jacob Enders and George Warner, who took to a tree when they discovered my Oneidas in their paint, but came out when I called them by name, and gave an account that they were hunting a notori-

ous Tory,—a renegade and late officer in the Schoharie Regiment,—a certain George Mann, a captain, who would have carried his entire company to McDonald, but was surprised in his villainy and had fled to the woods near Fox Creek.

I told them that we had not seen this fellow, and asked for news; and Warner showed me a scalp which he said he took an hour ago from Ogeyonda, after shooting that treacherous savage at the Flockey.

He gave it to Tahioni, which pleased the Oneida mightily and contented me; for I hate to see any white man take a scalp, though Tim Murphy and Dave Elerson took them as coolly as they took any other peltry.

Warner said that McDonald was up the valley, murdering and burning his way westward; that cavalry from Albany had just arrived, had raided Brick House and taken prisoner a lot of red-patch militia, forced them to tear up their Royal Protections, tied up the most obnoxious, and kicked out the remainder with a warning.

He said, further, that Adam Crysler and Joseph Brown, of Clyberg, were great villains and had joined McDonald with Billy Zimmer and others; and that McDonald had a motley army, full of kilted Highlanders, chasseurs, red-patches, Indians, and painted Tories; and that the cavalry from Albany were marching to meet them, reinforced by Schoharie mounted-militia under Colonel Harper.

And now, even as Warner was still speaking, we heard the trumpet of the cavalry on the river road below; and, running out to the forest's edge, we saw the Albany Riders marching up the river,—two hundred horsemen in bright new helmets and uniforms, finely horsed, their naked sabers all glittering in the sun, and their trumpeter trotting ahead on a handsome white charger.

The horses, four abreast, were at a fast walk; flankers galloped ahead on either wing. And, as we hurried down to the road, an officer I knew, Lieutenant Wirt, came spurring forward to meet and question us, followed by two troopers,—one named Rose and the other was Jake Van Dyck, whom I also recognized.

"Jack Drogue, by all the gods of war!" cried the handsome lieutenant, as I saluted and spoke to him by name.

"Dave Wirt!" I exclaimed, offering my hand, which he grasped, leaning wide from his saddle.

He turned his mount toward the road again, and I and my Oneidas walked along beside him.

"Are those your tame panthers?" he demanded, pointing toward

my Oneidas with his sword. "If they are, then we should have agreeable work for them and for you, Jack Drogue. For Vrooman and his men are in Stone House and the red-patches fire on them whenever they show a head; and our cavalry are like to strike McDonald at any moment now. We caught two of his damned spies——"

At that instant, far down the road I saw a woman; and even at that distance I recognized her.

"Yonder walks a bad citizen," said I sharply. "That is Madame Staats!"

We had now arrived beside the moving column of riders; and, as I spoke, a dozen cavalrymen shouted: "Here comes Rya's Pup!"

A captain of cavalry who spoke English with a French accent shouted to the Pup and beckoned her; but she turned and ran the other way.

Immediately two troopers spurred after her and caught her as she was fording the river; and each seized her by a hand, turned their horses, and trotted back to us with their prisoner, amid shouts of laughter.

Rya's Pup, breathless from her enforced run, fairly spat at us in her fury, cursing and threatening and holding her panting flanks in turn.

"You dirty rebel dogs!" she screamed, "wait till McDonald catches you! Ah—there'll be blood enow for you all to wade in as I waded in the river yonder, when your filthy cavalry headed me!"

Wirt tried to question her, but she mocked us all, boasted that McDonald had a huge army at the Flockey, and that he was now on his way to Stone House to destroy us all.

"Turn that slut loose!" said the Captain sharply.

So we let go the Pup, and she turned and legged it, yelling her scorn and fury as she ran; and we saw her go floundering and splashing across the river, doubtless to carry news of us to McDonald.

And it contented us that she so do, because now we came upon Stone House, where the small garrison under a Lieutenant Wallace had ventured out and were a-digging of a ditch and piling fence rails across the road to stop McDonald's riders in a charge.

Here, also, were Harper's mounted militia, sitting their saddles, poorly armed with militia fire-locks.

But we had a respectable force and were ashamed to await the outlaws behind ditch and rail; so we marched on through

the gathering dusk to a house about two miles further, where a dozen strangely painted horsemen galloped away as we approached.

A yell of rage at sight of those blue-eyed Indians arose from our riders. Our trumpet sounded; the cavalry broke into a gallop.

It was now twilight.

I begged some mounted militia-men to take me and my Oneidas up behind them; and they were obliging enough to do so; and we jogged away into the rosy dusk of an August evening.

Almost immediately I saw the Flockey ahead, and Adam Crysler's house on the bank; and on the lawn in front of it I saw McDonald's grotesque legion drawn up in line of battle.

As I came up our cavalry was forming to charge; Lieutenant Wirt had just turned in his saddle to speak to me, when one of the outlaws ran out to the edge of the lawn and called across the road to Wirt that he should never live to marry Angelica Vrooman,* but would die a dog's death as he deserved.

As the cavalry charged, Wirt rode directly at this man, who coolly shot him out of his saddle.

I saw and recognized the outlaw, who was a Tory named Shafer.

As Wirt fell to the grass, stone dead, his horse knocked down Shafer. The Tory got up, streaming with blood but not badly hurt, and, clubbing his piece, attempted to dash out Wirt's dead brains; but Trooper Rose swung his horse violently against Shafer, sabred him, and, in turn, fell from his own saddle, fatally wounded.

Another trooper dismounted to pick up poor Rose, who was in a bad way, but one of McDonald's painted Tories fired on them and both fell.

I fired at this man and wounded him, and Tahioni chased him, caught him, and slew him by the fence.

Then, above the turmoil of horses and gun-shots, the Oneida's terrific scalp-yell rang out in the deepening dusk; and at that dread panther-cry a panic seemed to seize McDonald's men, for their grotesque riders suddenly whirled their horses and stampeded ventre-à-terre, riding westward like damned men; and I saw their Highlanders and Chasseurs and renegade Greens break and scatter into the forest on every side, melting away into the night before our eyes.

* Angelica Vrooman sewed the winding sheet for Lieutenant Wirt's body.

Into the brush leaped my Oneidas; their war-yells awoke the shuddering echoes of Brakabeen Wood. I saw a chasseur leap a rail fence, stumble, and fall with the Screech-owl on top of him. Again the awful Oneida scalp-yelp rang out under the first dim stars.

The cavalry returned and camped at Stone House that night. They brought in their dead by torch-light; and I saw Wirt's body borne on a stretcher, and the corpse of Trooper Rose, and others.

One by one my Oneidas returned like blood-slaked and weary hounds. All had taken scalps, and sat late at our fire to hoop and stretch them, and neatly plait the miserable dead hair that hung all draggled from the pitiful shreds of skin.

At a cavalry watch-fire near to ours were also some people I knew—Mayfield men of a scout of six, just come in; and I went over to their fire and greeted them and questioned them concerning news from home.

Truman Christie was their lieutenant; Sol and Seely Woodworth, the two Reynolds, and Billy Dunham composed the scout; and all were in rifle-dress and keen to try their rifles on McDonald, but were arrived too late, and feared now that the outlaws were on their way to Canada.

Christie told me that the alarm in Johnstown and at Mayfield was great; that hostile Indians had been seen near Tribes Hill, and had killed a farmer there; that some people were leaving Caughnawaga and moving their household goods down the river to Schenectady.

"By God," says he, "and I don't blame 'em, John Drogue! No! For a Mohawk war party is like to strike Caughnawaga at any hour; and why foolish folk, like old Douw Fonda, remain there is beyond my comprehension."

"Douw Fonda!" said I, astonished. "Why, he is gone to Albany."

"He came back a week ago," says Christie. "They tell me that the young Patroon tried to dissuade the old gentleman from going, but could do nothing with him—Mr. Fonda being childish and obstinate—and so he had his way and summoned his coach and his three niggers and drove in state up the river to Caughnawaga. We passed that way on scout, and I saw the old gentleman two days ago sitting on his porch with his gold-headed walking stick and his book, and dozing there in the sun; and the yellow-haired girl knitting at his feet——"

"What!"

He looked at me, startled by my vehemence.

"Sir," said he, "did I say aught to offend you?"

"Good God, no. You say that the—the yellow-haired girl, Penelope Grant, is at Caughnawaga with Douw Fonda!"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see her?"

"I did; and spoke with her."

"What did she say?" I asked unsteadily.

"She said that Mr. Fonda had sent a negro servant to Johnstown to fetch her, because, having returned to Caughnawaga, he needed her."

"I think Mr. Fonda's three sons and their families must all be mad to permit the old gentleman to come to Caughnawaga in such perilous times as these!" I said sharply.

"And so do I think likewise," rejoined Christie. "Let them think and say what they like, but, Mr. Drogue, I am an old Indian fighter and have served under Colonel Claus and Sir William Johnson. I know the Iroquois; I know their ways and wiles and craft and subtle designs; and I know how they think, and what they are most likely to do.

"And I say to you very solemnly, Mr. Drogue, that were I Joseph Brant I would strike Caughnawaga before snow flies. And, sir, under God, it is my honest belief that he will do exactly that very thing. And it will be a sorry business for the Valley when he does so!"

It was a dreadful thing for me to hear this veteran affirm what I myself already feared.

But I had never dreamed that the aged Douw Fonda would return to Caughnawaga, or that his sons would permit the obstinate, helpless, and childish old gentleman to so have his say and way in times like these.

Nor did I dream that Penelope would go to him again. I knew, of course, that she would surely go if he asked for her; but thought he had too completely forgotten her—as the Patroon wrote—and that his childishness and feeble memory no longer retained any remembrance of the young girl he had loved and had offered to adopt and to make his legatee.

The news that Captain Christie brought was truly dismal news for me and most alarming.

What on earth I could do about it I had no idea. Penelope, the soul of loyalty, believed that her duty lay with Mr. Fonda, and that, if he asked for her, she must go and care for him,

who had been to her a father when she was poor, shelterless, and alone.

I realized that no argument, no plea of mine could move her to abandon him now. And what logic could I employ to arouse this childish and obstinate old gentleman to any apprehension of his own peril or hers?

To think of it madded me, because Mr. Fonda had three wealthy sons living near him, who could care for him properly with their ample means and all their servants and slaves. And why in God's name Captain John Fonda, Major Jelles Fonda, or Major Adam Fonda did not take some means of moving themselves and their families into the Queens Fort, or, better still, into Albany, I can not comprehend.

But it was a fact, as Christie related to me, that scarce a soul had fled from Caughnawaga. All the landed gentry remained; all people of high or low degree were still there—folk like the Veeders, Sammons, Romeyns, Hansens, Yates, Putmans, Stevens, Fishers, Gaults.

That night my dreams were horrible: I seemed to see Dries Bowman's body spinning in the sunshine, whilst he darted his swollen tongue at me like a snake. And always I seemed all wet with blood and could not dry myself or escape the convulsed embrace of the Little Maid of Askalege.

Moaning, waking with a cry on my lips to gaze on the red embers of our fire and see my Indians stir under their blankets and open slitted eyes at me—or to lie exhausted in body and all trembling in my thoughts, while the slow, dark hours dragged to the dead march beating in my heart—thus passed the night at Stone House, full of visions of the dead.

Long ere the cavalry trumpet pealed and the tired troopers awakened after near fifty miles of riding the day before, I had dragged my weary Indians from their sleep; and almost immediately we were on our way, eating a pinch of salted corn from the palms of our hands as we moved forward. For, after a brief ceremony in the Wood of Brakabeen, I meant to make Johnstown without a halt. My mind was full of anxiety for Caughnawaga, and for her who had promised herself to me when again I should come to seek her.

But first we must halt in the Wood of Brakabeen to fulfill in ceremony that office due to the memory of a brave and faithful Oneida warrior—our little Maid of Askalege.

It was not yet dawn, and the glades of Brakabeen Wood were

dark and still; and on the ferns and grasses rested myriads of fireflies, all pulsating with faint phosphorescence.

I thought of Thiohero as I had beheld her in this glade, swaying on her slender feet amid a dizzy whirl of fireflies.

Tahioni had gathered a dry faggot; Kwiyeh carried a bundle of cherry-birch, samphire, and witch-hopple. The Water-snake laid the fire.

All seated themselves; I struck flint, blew the tinder to a coal, and lighted a silver birch-shred.

The scented smoke mounted straight up through the trees; I rose in silence; and when the first burning stick fell into soft white ashes, I took a few flakes in my palm and rubbed them across my forehead. Then I spoke, facing the locked gates of morning in the dark:

"Now—now I hear your voice coming to us through the forest in the night.

"Now our hearts are heavy, little sister. The gates of morning are still locked; the forest is still; everywhere there is thick darkness.

"Thiohero, listen!

"Now we Oneidas are depressed in our minds. You were a prophetess. You foretold events. You were a warrior. We were your clansmen of the Little Red Foot. You were a sorceress. Empty moccasins danced when you touched the witch-drum. Now, in white plumes, you have mounted to the stars like morning mist.

"Oyaneh! Continue to listen.

"Our lodge is empty without you. Our fire is lonely without you. Our hearts are desolate, O Thiohero Oyaneh!

"Little Sister, continue to listen!

"We have heard your voice at this hour coming to us through the Wood of Brakabeen. It comes in darkness like light when the gates of morning open.

"Thiohero Oyaneh, virgin warrior of the People of the Rock, we are come to the Wood of Brakabeen to greet and thank you.

"We give you gratitude and love. You were a warrior and wore the Little Red Foot. You struck your enemies where you found them. They are dead and without scalps, your enemies. The Canienga howl. Your war-axe sticks in their heads. The Hessians are swine. Your scarlet arrows turn them into porcupines. The green-coats flee and your bullets burn their bowels.

"O my little sister, listen now!

"Our trail is very lonely without you. We are dejected. We

move like old men and sick. We need your wisdom. We are less wise than those littlest ones still strapped to the cradle board.

"*Thiohero!*

"We have placed food and a cup of water for you lest you hunger and thirst.

"We have laid a bow and scarlet arrows near you so that you shall hunt when you wish.

"We have given you moccasins so that the strange, bright trail shall not hurt your feet.

"We have placed paint for you so that Tharon shall know you by your clan. And we have made for your grave a cross of silver-birch, so that our white Lord Christ shall meet you and take you by the hand in a land so new and strange.

"*Oyaneh!*

"We have said what is in our hearts and minds. We think that is all we have to say. We turn our eyes to the morning. When the gates open we shall depart."

As I ended, the three Oneidas rose and faced the east in silence. All the sky had become golden. Minute after minute passed. Suddenly a blinding lance of light pierced the Wood of Brakabeen.

"Haih!" they exclaimed softly. "Nai Thiohero Oyaneh!"

Tahioni covered the fire. The Screech-owl marked us all with a coal still warm.

Then, in silence, I led my people from the misty Wood of Brakabeen.

CHAPTER XXX

A LONG GOOD-BYE

ON the evening of the 15th of August, the Commandant of Johnstown Fort stood aghast to see a forest-running ragamuffin and three scarecrow Indians stagger into headquarters at the jail.

"Gad a-mercy!" says he as I offered the salute, "is it *you,* Mr. Drogue!"

I was past all speech; for we had wolf-jogged all the way up from the river, but from my rags I fished out my filthy papers and thrust them at him. He was kind enough to ask me to sit; I nodded a like permission to my Oneidas and dropped onto a settle; a sergeant fetched new-baked bread, meat, buttermilk, and pipes for my Indians; and for me a draught of summer cider, which presently I swallowed to the dregs when I found strength to do it.

This refreshed me. I asked permission to lodge my Oneidas in some convenient barn and to draw for them food, pay, tobacco, and clothing; and very soon a corporal of Continentals arrived with a lantern and led the Oneidas out into the night.

Then, at the Commandant's request, I gave a verbal account of my scout, and reminded him of my instructions, which were to report at Saratoga.

But he merely shuffled my papers together and smiled, saying that he would attend to that matter, and that there were new orders lately arrived for me, and a sheaf of letters, among which two had been sent in with a flag, and seals broken.

"Sir," he said, still smiling in kindly fashion, "I have every reason to believe that patriotic service faithfully performed is not to remain too long unrecognized at Albany. And this business of yours amounts to that, Mr. Drogue."

He laughed and rubbed his powerful hands together, peering good-humouredly at me out of a pair of small and piercing eyes.

"However," he added, "all this is for you to learn from others in higher places than I occupy. Here are your letters, Mr. Drogue."

He laid his hand on a sheaf which lay near his elbow on the

table and handed them to me. They were tied together with tape which had been sealed.

"Sir," said he, "you are in a woeful plight for lack of sleep; and I should not detain you. You lodge, I think, at Burke's Tavern. Pray, sir, retire to your quarters at your convenience, and dispose of well-earned leisure as best suits you."

He rose, and I got stiffly to my feet.

"Your Indians shall have every consideration," said he. "And I dare guess, sir, that you are destined to discover at the Tavern news that should pleasure you."

We saluted; I thanked him for his kind usage, and took my leave, so weary that I scarce knew what I was about.

How I arrived at the Tavern without falling asleep on my two legs as I walked, I do not know. Jimmy Burke, who had come out with a light to greet me, lifted his hands to heaven at sight of me.

"John Drogue! Is it yourself, avic? Ochone, the poor lad! Wirra the day!" says he, —"and luk at him in his rags and thin as a clapperrail!" And, "Magda! Betty!" he shouts, "f'r the sake o' the saints, run fetch a wash-tub above, an' b'ilin' wather in a can, and soft-soap, too, an' a-bite-an'-a-sup, or himself will die on me two hands——"

I heard maids running as I climbed the stairway, gripping at the rail to steady me. I was asleep in my chair when some one shook me.

Blindly I pulled the dirty rags from my body and let them fall anywhere; and I near died o' drowning in the great steaming tub, for twice I fell asleep in the bath. I know not who pulled me out. I do not remember eating. They say I did eat. Nor can I recollect how, at last, I got me into bed.

I was still deeply asleep when Burke awoke me. He had a great bowl of smoking soupaan and a pitcher of sweet milk; and I ate and drank, still half asleep. But now the breeze from the open window and the sunshine in my room slowly cleared my battered senses. I began to remember where I was, and to look about the room.

Mine was the only bed; and there was nobody lying in it save only myself, yet it was evident that another gentleman shared this room with me; for yonder, on a ladder-back chair, lay somebody's clothing neatly folded,—a Continental officer's uniform, on which I perceived the insignia of a staff-captain.

Spurred boots also stood there, and a smartly cocked hat.

And now, on a peg in the wall, I discovered this unknown officer's watch-coat, and his sword dangling by it, and a brace o' pistols.

But where the devil the owner of these implements might be I could not guess.

And now my eyes fell upon the sheaf of letters lying on the table beside me. I broke the sealed tape that bound them; they fell upon the bed clothes; and I picked up the first at hazard, which was a packet, and broke the seal of it. And sat there in my night shift, utterly astounded at what I beheld.

For within the packet were two papers. One was a captain's commission in the Continental Line; and my own name was writ upon it.

And the other paper was a letter, sent express from the Forest of Dean, five days since, and it was from Major General Lord Stirling to me, acquainting me that he had taken the liberty to request a captain's commission in the Line for me; that His Excellency had concurred in the request; that a commission had been duly granted and issued; and that—His Excellency still graciously concurring and General Schuyler endorsing the request—I had been transferred from the State Rangers to the Line, and from the Line to the military family of General Lord Stirling. And should report to him at the Forest of Dean.

To this elegant and formal and amazing letter, writ by a secretary and signed by my Lord Stirling, was appended in his own familiar hand this postscript:

"Jack Drogue will not refuse his old friend, Billy Alexander. So for God's sake leave your rifle-shirt and moccasins in Johnstown and put on the clothing which I have bespoken of the same Johnstown tailoress who made your forest dress and mine when in happier days we hunted and fished with Sir William in the pleasant forests of Fonda's Bush."

I sat there quite overcome, gazing now upon my commission, now upon my friend's kind letter, now at my beautiful new uniform which his consideration had procured for me while I was wandering leagues away in the Northern bush, never dreaming that a celebrated Major General had time to waste on any thought concerning me.

There was a bell-rope near my bed, and now I pulled it, and said to the buxom wench who came that I desired a barber to trim me instantly, and that the pot-boy should run and fetch him and bid him bring his irons and powder and an assortment of queue ribbons for a club.

The barber arrived as I, having bathed me, was dressing in fresh underwear which I found rolled snug in the pack I had left here when I went away.

Lord, but my beard and hair were like Orson's; and I gave myself to the razor with great content; and later to the shears, bidding young Master Snips shape my pol for a club and powder in the most fashionable and military mode then acceptable to the service.

Which he swore he knew how to accomplish; so I took my letters from the bed and disposed myself in a chair to peruse them while Snips should remain busy with his shears.

The first letter I unsealed was from Nick Stoner, and written from Saratoga:

"Friend Jack,

"I take quill and ink to acquaint you how it goes with us here in the regiment.

"I am fifer, and when in action am stationed near to the colours for duty. Damn them, they should give me a gun, also, as I can shoot better than any of 'em, as you know.

"My brother John is a drummer in our regiment, and has learned all his flamms and how to beat all things lively save the devil.

"My father is a private in our regiment, which is pleasant for all, and he is a dead shot and afeard of nothing save hell.

"I have got into mischief and been punished on several occasions. I like not being triced up between two halbards.

"I long to see Betsy Browse. She hath a pretty way of kissing. And sometimes I long to see Anne Mason, who has her own way, too. You are not acquainted with that saucy baggage, I think. But she lives only two miles from where my Betsy abides. And I warrant you I was put to it, sparking both, lest they discover I drove double harness. And there was Zuyler's pretty daughter, too—but enough of tender memories!

"Anna has raven hair and jet black eyes and is snowy otherwise. I don't mean cold. Angelica Zuyler is fair of hair but brown for the rest——

"Well, Jack, I think on you every day and hope you do well with your Oneidas, who, we hear, are out with you on the Schoharie.

"Our head-quarters runner is your old Saguenay, and he is much trusted by our General, they say. Sometimes the fierce fellow comes to visit me, but asks only for news of you, and when I say I have none he sits in silence. And always, when he leaves, he says very solemnly: 'Tell my Captain that I am a real man. But did not know it until my Captain told me so.'

"Now the news is that Burgoyne finds himself in a pickle since the bloody battle at Oriskany. I think he flounders like a big chain-pike stranded belly-deep in a shallow pool which is slowly drying up around him.

"We are no longer afeard of his Germans, his General Baum-Boom, his famous artillery, or his Indians.

"What the Tryon County lads did to St. Leger we shall surely do to that big braggart, John Burgoyne. And mean to do it presently.

"I send this letter to you by Adam Helmer, who goes this day to Schenectady, riding express.

"I give you my hand and heart. I hope Penelope is well.

"And beg permission to remain, sir, your most humble and obliged and obedient servant,

"NICHOLAS STONER."

I laid aside Nick's letter, half smiling, half sad, at the thoughts it evoked within me.

Young Master Snips was now a-drying of my hair. I opened another letter, which bore the inscription, 'By flag.' It had been unsealed, which, of course, was the rule, and so approved and delivered to me:

"DEAR JACK,

"I am fearfully unhappy. This day news is brought of the action at Oriska, and that my dear brother is dead.

"I pray you, if it be within your power, to give my poor Stephen decent burial. He was your boyhood friend. Ah, God, what an unnatural strife is this that sets friend against friend, brother against brother, father against son!

"Can you not picture my wretchedness and distress to know that my darling brother is slain, that my husband is at this moment facing the terrible rifle-fire of your infuriated soldiery, that many of my intimate friends are dead or wounded at this terrible Oriskany where they say your maddened soldiers flung aside their muskets and leaped upon our Greens and Rangers with knife and hatchet, and tore their very souls out with naked hands.

"I pray that you were not involved in that horrible affair. I pray that you may live through these fearful times to the end, whatever that end shall be. God alone knows.

"I thank you for your generous forbearance and chivalry to us on the Oneida Road. I saw your painted Oneida Indians crouch-

ing in the roadside weeds, although I did not tell you that I had discovered them. But I was terrified for my baby. You have heard how Iroquois Indians sometimes conduct.

"Dear Jack, I can not find in my heart any unkind thought of you. I trust you think of me as kindly.

"And so I ask you, if it be within your power, to give my poor brother decent burial. And mark the grave so that one day, please God, we may remove his mangled remains to a friendlier place than Tryon has proven for me and mine.

"I am, dear Jack, with unalterable affection,

"Your unhappy,

"POLLY."

My eyes were misty as I laid the letter aside, resolving to do all I could to carry out Lady Johnson's desires. For not until long afterward did I hear that Steve Watts had survived his terrible wounds and was finally safe from the vengeance of outraged Tryon.

Another letter, also with broken seal, I laid open and read while Snips heated his irons and gazed out of the breezy window, where, with fife and drum, I could hear the garrison marching out for exercise and practice.

And to the lively marching music of *The Huron,* I read my letter from Claudia Swift:

"Oneida; Aug: 7th, 1777.

"MY DEAREST JACK,

"I am informed that I may venture to send this epistle under a flag that goes out today. No doubt but some Yankee Paul Pry in blue-and-buff will crack the seal and read it before you receive it.

"But I snap my fingers at him. I care not. I am bold to say that I do love you. And dearly! So much for Master Pry!

"But, alas, my friend, now indeed I am put to it; for I must confess to you a sadder and deeper anxiety. For if I love you, sir, I am otherwise *in* love. And with another! I shall not dare to confess his name. But *you saw and recognized him* at Summer House when Steve was there a year ago last spring.

"Now you know. Yes, I am madly in love, Jack. And am racked with terrors and nigh out o' my wits with this awful news of the Oriska battle.

"We hear that Captain Walter Butler is taken out o' uniform within your lines; and so, lacking the protection of his regimentals, he is like to suffer as a spy. My God! Was he *alone*

when apprehended by Arnold's troops? And will General Arnold hang him?

"This is the urgent news I ask of you. I am horribly afraid. In mercy send me some account; for there are terrible rumours afloat in this fortress—rumours of other spies taken by your soldiery, and of brutal executions—I can not bring myself to write of what I fear. Pity me, Jack, and write me what you hear.

"Could you not beg this one mercy of Billy Alexander, that he send a flag or contrive to have one sent from your Northern Department, explaining to us poor women what truly has been,—and is like to be—the fate of such unfortunate prisoners in your hands?

"And remember who it is appeals to you, dear Jack; for even if I have not merited your consideration,—if I, perhaps, have even forfeited the regard of Billy Alexander,—I pray you both to remember that you once were a little in love with me.

"And so, deal with me gently, Jack. For I am frightened and sick at heart; and know very little about love, which, for the first time ever in my life, has now undone me.

"Will you not aid and forgive your unhappy, CLAUDIA."

Good Lord! Claudia enamoured! And enamoured of that great villain, Henry Hare! Why, damn him, he hath a wife and children, too, or I am most grossly in error.

I had not heard that Walter Butler was taken. I knew not whether Lieutenant Hare had been caught in Butler's evil company or if, indeed, he had fought at all with old John Butler at Oriska.

Frowning, disgusted, yet sad also to learn that Claudia could so rashly and so ignobly lavish her affections, nevertheless I resolved to ask Lord Stirling if a flag could not be sent with news to Claudia and such other anxious ladies as might be eating their hearts out at Oneida, or Oswego, or Buck Island.

And so I laid aside her painful letter, and unfolded the last missive. And discovered it was writ me by Penelope:

"You should not think harshly of me, Jack Drogue, if you return and discover that I am gone away from Johnstown.

"Douw Fonda is returned to Cayadutta Lodge. He has now sent a carriage for to fetch me. It is waiting while I write. I can not refuse him.

"If, when we meet again, you desire to know my mind con-

cerning you, then, if you choose to look into it, you shall discover that my mind contains only a single thought. And the thought is for you.

"But if you desire no longer to know my mind when again—if ever—we two meet together, then you shall not feel it your duty to concern yourself about my mind, or what thought may be within it.

"I would not write coldly to you, John Drogue. Nor would I importune with passion.

"I have no claim upon your further kindness. You have every claim upon my life-long gratitude.

"But I offer more than gratitude if you should still desire it; and I would offer less—if it should better please you.

"Feel not offended; feel free. Come to me if it pleaseth you; and, if you come not, there is in me that which shall pardon all you do, or leave undone, as long as ever I shall live on earth.

"PENELOPE GRANT."

When Snips had powdered me and had tied my club with a queue-ribbon of his proper selection, he patched my cheek-bone where a thorn had torn me, and stood a-twirling his iron as though lost in admiration of his handiwork.

When I paid him I bade him tell Burke to bring around my horse and fetch my saddle bags; and then I dressed me in my regimentals.

When Burke came with the saddle-bags, we packed them together. He promised to care for my rifle and pack, took my new light blanket over his arm, and led the way down stairs, where I presently perceived Kaya saddled, and pricking ears to hear my voice.

Whilst I caressed her and whispered in her pretty ear the idle tenderness that a man confides to a beloved horse, Burke placed my pistols, strapped saddle-bags and blanket, and held my stirrup as I gathered bridle and set my spurred boot firmly on the steel.

And so swung to my saddle, and sat there, dividing bridles, deep fixed in troubled thought and anxiously concerned for the safety of the unselfish but very stubborn girl I loved.

I had said my adieux to Jimmy Burke; I had taken leave of the Commandant at the palisades jail. I now galloped Kaya through the town, riding by way of Butlersbury;* and saw the

* A letter written by Colonel Butler so designates the place where the ancient Butler house is still standing. The letter mentioned is in the possession of the author.

steep roof of the Butler house through the grove, and shuddered as I thought of the unhappy young man who had lived there and who, at that very moment, might be hanging by his neck while the drums rolled from the hollow square.

Down the steep hill I rode, careful of loose stone, and so came to the river and to Caughnawaga.*

All was peaceful and still in the noonday sunshine; the river wore a glassy surface; farm waggons creaked slowly through golden dust along the Fort Johnson highway; fat cattle lay in the shade; and from the brick chimneys of Caughnawaga blue smoke drifted where, in her cellar kitchen, the good wife was a-cooking of the noontide dinner.

When presently I espied Douw Fonda's great mansion of stone, I saw nobody on the porch, and no smoke rising from the chimneys, yet the front door stood open.

But when I rode up to the porch, a black wench came from the house, who said that Mr. Fonda dined at his son's that day, and would remain until evening.

However, when I made inquiry for Penelope, I found that she was within,—had already been served with dinner,—and was now gone to the library to read and knit as usual when alone.

The black wench took my mare and whistled shrilly for a slave to come and hold the horse.

But I had already mounted the stoop and entered the silent house; and now I perceived Penelope, who had risen from a chair and was laying aside her book and knitting.

She seemed very white when I went to her and drew her into my embrace; and she rested her cheek against my shoulder and took close hold of my two arms, but uttered not a word.

Under her lace cap her hair glimmered like sun-warmed gold; and her hands, which had become very fine and white again, began to move upward to my shoulders, till they encircled my neck and rested there, tight linked.

For a space she wept, but presently staunched her tears with her laced apron's edge, like a child at school. And when I made her look upon me she smiled though she still breathed sobbingly, and her lips still quivered as I kissed her.

We sat close together there in the golden gloom of the curtained room, where only a bar of dusty sunlight fell across a row of gilded books.

I had told her everything—had given an account of all that had

* Now the town of Fonda.

befallen my little scout, and how I had returned to Johnstown, and how so suddenly my fortunes had been completely changed.

I told her of what I knew of the battle at Oriskany, of the present situation at Stanwix and at Saratoga, and of what I saw of the fight at the Flockey, where McDonald ran.

I begged her to persuade Mr. Fonda to go to Albany, and she promised to do so. And when I pointed out in detail how perilous was his situation here, and how desperate her own, she said she knew it, and had been horribly afraid, but that Caughnawaga folk seemed strangely indifferent to the danger,—could not bring themselves to believe in it, perhaps,—and were loath to leave their homes unprotected and their fields untilled.

But when I touched on her leaving these foolish people and, as my wife, travelling southward with me to the great fortress on the Hudson, she only wept, saying, in tears, that she was needed by an old and feeble man who had protected her when she was poor and friendless, and that, though she loved me, her duty still lay first at Douw Fonda's side.

Quit him she utterly refused to do; and it was in vain I pointed out his three stalwart sons and their numerous families, retainers, tenants, servants, and slaves, who ought to care for the obstinate old gentleman and provide a security for him whether he would or no.

But argument was useless; I knew it. And all I obtained of her was that, whether matters north of us mended or grew worse, she would persuade Mr. Fonda to return to Albany until such time as Tryon County became once more safe to live in.

This she promised, and even assured me that she had already spoken of the matter to Mr. Fonda, and that the old gentleman appeared to be quite willing to return to Albany as soon as his grain could be reaped and threshed.

So with this I had to content my heavy heart. And now, by the tall clock, I perceived that my time was up; for Schenectady lay far away, and Albany father still; and it was like to be a long and dreary journey to West Point, if, indeed, I should find Lord Stirling still there.

For at Johnstown fort that morning I was warned that my General Lord Stirling had already rejoined his division in the Jerseys; and that the news was brought by riflemen of Morgan's corps, which was now swiftly marching to join our Northern forces near Saratoga.

Well, God's will must obtain on earth; none can thwart it; none foretell——

At the thought I looked down at Penelope, where I held her clasped; and I told her of the vision of Thiohero.

She remained very still when she learned what the Little Maid of Askalege had seen there beside me in the cannon-cloud, where the German foresters of Hainau, in their outlandish dress, were shouting and shooting.

For Penelope had seen the same white shape; and had been, she said, afeard that it was my own weird she saw,—so white it seemed to her, she said,—so still and shrouded in its misty veil.

"Was it I?" she whispered in an awed voice. "Was it truly I that the Oneida virgin saw? And did she know my features in the shroud?"

"She saw you all in white and flowers, floating there near me like mist at sunrise."

"She told you it was I?"

"Dying, she so told me. And, 'Yellow Hair,' she gasped, 'is quite a witch!' And then she died between my arms."

"I am no witch," she whispered.

"Nor was the Little Maid of Askalege. Both of you, I think, saw at times things that we others can not perceive until they happen;—the shadow of events to come."

"Yes."

After a silence: "Have you, perhaps, discovered other shadows since we last met, Penelope?"

"Yes; shadows."

"What coming event cast them?"

After a long pause: "Will it make his mind more tranquil if I tell him?" she murmured to herself; and I saw her dark eyes fixed absently on the dusty ray of sunlight slanting athwart the room.

Then she looked up at me; blushed to her hair: "I saw children —with *yellow hair*—and *your* eyes——"

"With *your* hair!"

"And *your* eyes—John Drogue—John Drogue——"

The stillness of Paradise grew all around us, filling my soul with a great and heavenly silence.

We could not die—we two who stood here so closely clasped—until this vision had been fulfilled.

And so, presently, her hands fell into mine, and our lips joined slowly, and rested.

We said no word. I left her standing there in the golden twilight of the curtains, and got to my saddle,—God knows how,—and rode away beside the quiet river to the certain destiny that no man ever can hope to hinder or escape.

CHAPTER XXXI

"IN THE VALLEY"

ON the 24th of June, 1777, Major General Lord Stirling had disobeyed the orders of His Excellency; and, in consequence, his flank was turned, he lost two guns and 150 men.*

It is the only military mistake that my Lord Stirling ever made; the only lesson he ever had to learn in military judgment and obedience.

I was of his family for three years,—serving as one of his secretaries and aids-de-camp.

I was present at the battle of Brandywine; I served under him at Germantown in the fog, and at Monmouth; and never doubted that my Lord Stirling was a fine and capable and knightly soldier, if not possibly a great one.

Yet, perhaps, there was only one great soldier in that long and bloody war of the American Revolution. I need not name His Excellency.

For nearly three years, as I say, I served as a member of Lord Stirling's military family. The lights and shadows of those days of fire and ice, of plenty and starvation, of joy and despair, of monstrous and incredible effort, and of paralyzing inaction, are known now to all.

And the end is not yet—nor, I fear, very near to a finish. But we all await our nation's destiny with confidence, I think;—and our own fate with composure.

No man can pass through such years and remain what he was born. No man can regret them; none can dare wish to live through such days again; none would shun them. And how many months, or years, maybe, of fighting still remain before us, no man can foretell. But the grim men in their scare-crow regimentals who today, in the present year of 1780, are closing ranks to prepare for future battles, even in the bitter after-

* The British account makes it three guns and 200 men.

math of defeat, seem to know, somehow, that this nation is destined to survive.

From the month of August in 1777 to May, 1780, I had not seen Penelope; I had asked for no leave to travel, knowing, by reason of my confidential office and better than many others, how desperate was our army's plight and how utterly every able-bodied man was needed.

In consequence, I had not seen my own Northland in all those months; I had not seen Penelope. Letters I wrote and sent to her when opportunity offered; letters came from her, and always written from Caughnawaga.

For it appeared that Douw Fonda had never consented to return to Albany; but, by some miracle of God, the Valley so far had suffered no serious harm. Yet, the terrible business at Wyoming renewed my every cruelest fear for the safety of Caughnawaga; and when, in the same year, a Continental regiment of the Pennsylvania Line marched out from Schoharie to destroy Unadilla, I, who knew the Iroquois, knew that their revenge was certain to follow.

It followed in that very year; and Cherry Valley became a bloodsoaked heap of cinders; and there, under Iroquois knife and hatchet, and under the merciless clubbed muskets of the *blue-eyed* Indians, many of my old friends died—all of the Wells family save only one—old and young and babies. What a crime was done by young Walter Butler on that fearful day! And I sometimes wonder, now, what our generous but sentimental young Marquis thinks of his deed of mercy when he saw and pitied Walter Butler in an Albany prison, sick and under sentence of death, and procured medical treatment for him and more comfortable quarters in a private residence.

And Butler drugged his sentry and slipped our fingers like a rat and was off in a trice and gone to his bloody destiny in the West! Lord—Lord!—the things men do to men!

When Brant burned Minnisink I trembled anew for Caughnawaga; and breathed freely only when our General Sullivan marched on Tioga with six thousand men.

Yet, though he cleaned out the foul and hidden nests of the Iroquois Confederacy, I, knowing these same Iroquois, knew in my dreading heart that Iroquois vengeance would surely strike again, and this time at the Valley.

Because, out of the Mohawk Valley, came all their chiefest

woes; Oriskany, which set the whole Six Nations howling their dead; Stillwater; Unadilla; Tioga; The Chemung—these battles tore the Iroquois to fragments.

The Long House, in ruins, rang with the frantic wailing of four fierce nations. The Senecas screamed in their pain from the Western Gate; the Cayugas and Onondagas were singing the death song of their nations; the proud Keepers of the Eastern Gate, driven headlong into exile, gathered like bleeding panthers on the frontier, their glowing gaze intent and patient, watching the usurpers and marking them for vengeance and destruction.

To me, personally, the conflict in my Northland had become unutterably horrible.

Our battles in the Jerseys, in Pennsylvania, in Delaware, and farther south, held for me no such horror and repugnance; for if the panoply of war be dreadful, its pomp and circumstance make it endurable and to be understood by human beings.

But to me there was something terrifying in secret ambush and ghastly massacre amid the eternal twilight of the Northern wilderness, where painted men stole through still places, intent on murder; where death was swift and silent, where all must watch and none dared rest; where children wept in their sleep, and mothers lay listening all night long, and hollow-eyed men cut their corn with sickle in one hand and rifle in the other.

We, in the Jerseys, watching red-coat and Hessian, heard of scalps taken in the North from babies lying in their cradles—aye, the very watch-dog at the gate was scalped; and painted Tories threw their victims over rail fences to hang there, disembowelled, like dead game.

We heard terrible and inhuman tales of Simon Girty, of Benjy Beacraft, of Billy Newbury—all old neighbours of mine, and now turned child-killers and murderers of helpless women—all painted men, now, ferocious and without mercy.

But these men had never been more than ignorant peasants and dull tillers of the soil for thriftier masters. Yet they were no crueller than others of birth and education. And what was I to think of Walter Butler and other gentlemen of like condition,—officers who had delivered Tom Boyd of Derry to the Senecas,—Colonel Paris to the Mohawks!

The day we heard that Sergeant Newbury and Henry Hare were taken, I thanked God on my knees. And when our General Clinton hung them both for human monsters as well as spies,

then I thanked God again. . . . And wrote tenderly to Claudia, poor misguided girl!—condoling with her—not for her grief and the death of Henry Hare *—but that the black disgrace of it should so nearly touch and soil her.

I have received, so far, no letter from Claudia in reply. But Lord Stirling tells me that she reigns a belle in New York; and that she hath wrought havoc among the Queen's Rangers, and particularly in De Lancy's Horse and the gay cavalry of Colonel Tarleton.

I pray her pretty, restless wings may not be singed or broken, or flutter, dying, in the web of Fate.

Nick Stoner's father, Henry, that grim old giant with his two earhoops in his leathery ears, and with all his brawn, and mighty strength, and the lurking scowl deep bitten betwixt his tiger eyes,—old Henry Stoner is dead and scalped.

Nick, who is now fife-major, has writ me this in a letter full of oaths and curses for the Iroquois who have done this shame to him and his.

For every hair on old Henry's mangled head, said he, an Iroquois should spit out his death-yell. He tells me that he means to quit the army and enter the business of tanning Iroquois hides to make boots and moccasins; and says that Tim Murphy has knee moccasins as fine as ever he saw, and made out o' leather skinned off an Indian's legs!

Faugh! Grief and shame have made Nick blood-mad. . . . Yet, I know not what I should do, or how conduct, if she who is nearest to my heart should ever suffer from an Indian.

This sweet April day, taking the air near Lord Stirling's marquee, I see the first white butterflies a-fluttering like wind-blown bits o' paper across the new grass. . . . In the North the woodlands should be soft with snow; and, in warm places, perhaps the butterfly we call the beauty of Camberwell may sit sipping the first drops o' maple sap. . . . And there should be a scent of pink arbutus in the breeze, if winds be soft. . . . Lord—Lord—I am become sick for home. . . . And would see my glebe again in Fonda's Bush; and hear the spring roaring of the Kennyetto between melting banks. . . . And listen to the fairy thunder of the cock partridge drumming on his log.

* In the writer's possession is a letter written by the widow of Lieutenant Hare, retailing the circumstances of his execution and praying for financial relief from extreme poverty. General Sir Frederick Haldimand indorses the application in his own handwriting and recommends a pension. The widow mentions her *six little children.*

My neighbours are all dead or gone away, they say. My house is a heap of wind-stirred ashes,—as are all houses in Fonda's Bush save only Stoner's. My cleared land sprouts young forests; my fences are gone; wolves travel my paths; deer pasture my hill; and my new orchard stands dead and girdled by wood-mouse and rabbit. . . . And still I be sick for a sight of it that was once my home,—and ever shall be while I possess a handful of mother earth to call mine own.

It is near the end of April and I seem sick, but would not have Billy Alexander think I mope.

I have a letter from Penelope. She lately saw a small scout on the Mohawk, it being a part of M'Kean's corps; and she recognized and conversed with several men who once composed my first war party—Jean de Silver, Benjamin De Luysnes, Joe de Golyer of Frenchman's Creek, and Godfrey Shew of Fish House.

They were on their way to Canada by way of Sacandaga, to learn what Sir John might be about. . . . God knows I also desire very earnestly to know what the sinister Baronet may be planning.

Penelope writes me that Tahioni the Wolf is dead in his glory; and that Hiakatoo took his scalp and heart. . . . I suppose that is glory enough for any dead young warrior, but the intelligence fills me with foreboding. And Kwiyeh the Screech-owl is dead at Lake Desolation, and so is Hanatoh the Water-snake, where some Praying Indians caught them in a canoe and made a dreadful example of my two young comrades. . . . But at least they were permitted to sing their death-songs, and so died happy—if that indeed be happiness. . . .

The Cadys, who were gone off to Canada, and John and Phil Helmer, have been seen in green uniforms and red; and Adam Helmer has sworn an oath to seek them, follow them, and slay them for the bloody turncoat dogs they are. Lord, Lord, how hast Thou changed Thy children into creatures of the wild to prey one upon another till all the Northland becomes once more a desert and empty of human life!

It is May. I sicken for Penelope and for my home.

I am given a furlough! I asked it not. Lord Stirling dismisses me—with a grin. Pretense of inspection covering the Johnstown district, and to count the batteaux between Schenectady and the Creek of Askalege! Which is but sheer nonsense; and I had as well spend the time a-telling of my thumbs—which Lord Stirling knows as well as I is the pastime of an idiot. . . . God bless him!

I am given a month to arrange my personal affairs. I have asked for nothing; and am given a month! . . . And stand here at the tent door all a-tremble while my mare is saddled, not trusting my voice lest it break and shame me before all. . . .

I close my *carnet* and strap it with a buckle.

I am on my way! Shad-bushes drop a million snowy petals in the soft May breeze; dogwood is in bloom; orchards are become great nosegays of pink and silver. Everywhere birds are singing.

And through this sweet Paradise I ride in my dingy regimentals; but my pistols are clean and my leathers; and my sword and spurs are bright, and chime gaily as I ride beside the great gray river northward, ever northward to my sweetheart and my home.

I baited at Tarrytown. The next night I was at Poughkeepsie, where the landlord was a low-Dutchman and a skinflint too.

I passed opposite to where Kingston lay in ashes, burned wantonly by a brute. And after that I advanced but slowly, for roads were bad and folk dour and suspicious—which state of mind I also shared and had no traffic with those I encountered, and chose to camp in the woods, too, rather than risk a night under the dubious roofs I saw, even though invited.

Only near the military posts in the Highlands did I feel truly secure until, one day at sunrise, I beheld the shining spires of Albany, and hundreds of gilded weather-cocks all shining me a welcome.

But in Albany streets I encountered silent people who looked upon me with no welcome in their haunted gaze; and everywhere I saw the same strange look,—pinched faces, brooding visages, a strained, intent gaze, yet vacant too, as though their eyes, which looked at me, saw nothing save some hidden vision within their secret minds.

I baited at the Half-Moon; and now I learned for the first what anxieties harassed these good burghers of the old Dutch city. For rumour had come the night before on the heels of a galloping light-horseman, that Sir John was expected to enter the Valley by the Sacandaga route; and that already strange Indians had been seen near Askalege.

How these same rumours originated nobody seemed to know. The light horseman had them from batteaux-men at Schenectady. But who carried such alarming news to the Queen's Fort nobody seemed to know, only that the garrison had become feverishly

active, and three small scouts were preparing to start for Schoharie and Caughnawaga.

All this from the landlord, a gross, fat, speckled man who trembled like a dish of jelly as he told it.

But as I went out to climb into my saddle, leaving my samp and morning draught untasted, comes a-riding a gay company of light horse, careless and debonaire. Their officer saluted my uniform and, as I spurred up beside him and questioned him, he smilingly assured me that the rumours had no foundation; that if Sir John came at all he would surely arrive by the Susquehanna; and that our scouts would give warning to the Valley in ample time.

God knows that what he said comforted me somewhat, yet I did not choose to lose any time at breakfast, either; so bought me a loaf at a bake-shop, and ate as I rode forward.

At noon I rode into the Queen's Fort and there fed Kaya. I saw no unusual activity there; none in the town, none on the river.

Officers of whom I made inquiry had heard nothing concerning Sir John; did not expect a raid from him before autumn anyway, and vowed that General Sullivan had scotched the Iroquois snake in its den and driven the fear o' God into Sir John and the two Butlers with the cannon at Chemung.

As I rode westward again, I saw all around me men at work in the fields, plowing here, seeding there, clearing brush-fields yonder. There seemed to be no dread among these people; all was calm as the fat Dutch cattle that stood belly deep in meadows, watching me out o' gentle, stupid eyes as I rode on toward Caughnawaga.

A woman whom I encountered, and who was driving geese, stopped to answer my inquiries. From her I learned that Colonel Fisher, at Caughnawaga, had received a letter from Colonel Jacob Klock six days ago, which stated that Sir John Johnson was marching on the Valley. But she assured me that this news was now entirely discredited by everybody, because on Sunday a week ago Captain Walter Vrooman, of Guilderland, had marched his company to Caughnawaga, but on arriving was told he was not needed, and so continued on to Johnstown.

I do not know why all these assurances from the honest people of the Valley did not ease my mind.

Around me as I rode all was sunny, still, and peaceful, yet deep in my heart always I seemed to feel the faint pulse of fear as I

looked around me upon a smiling region once familiar and upon which I had not laid eyes for nearly three whole years.

And my nearness to Penelope, too, so filled me with happy impatience that the last mile seemed a hundred leagues on the dusty Schenectady road.

I had just come into view of the first chimneys of Caughnawaga, and was riding by an empty waggon driven by an old man, when, very far away, I heard a gun-shot.

I drew bridle sharply and asked the man in the waggon if he also had heard it; but his waggon rattled and he had not. However, he also pulled up; and we stood still, listening.

Then, again, and softened by distance, came another gun-shot.

The old man thought it might be some farmer emptying his piece to clean it.

As he spoke, still far away along the river we heard several shots fired in rapid succession.

With that, the old man fetched a yell: "Durn-ding it!" he screeched, "if Sir John's in the Valley it ain't no place for my old woman and me!" And he lashed his horses with the reins, and drove at a crazy gallop toward the distant firing.

At the same moment I spurred Kaya, who bounded forward over the rise of land; and instantly I saw smoke in the sky beyond the Johnstown Road, and caught a glimpse of other fires in another direction, very near to where should stand the dwellings of Jim Davis and Sampson Sammons.

And now, seated by the roadside just ahead, I saw a young man whom I knew by sight, named Abe Veeder; and I pulled in my horse and called to him.

He would not move or notice me, and seemed distracted; so I spurred up to him and caught him by the shirt collar. At that he jumps up in a fright, and:

"Oh, Jesus!" he bawls, "Sir John's red devils are murdering everybody from Johnstown to the River!"

"Where are they?" I cried. "Answer me and compose yourself!"

"Where are they?" he shrieked. "Why, they're everywhere! Lodowick Putman's house is afire and they've murdered him and Aaron. Amasa Stevens' house is burning, and he hangs naked and scalped on his garden fence!

"They killed Billy Gault and that other man from the old country, and they murdered Captain Hansen in his bed, and his house is all afire! Everything in the Valley is afire!" he screamed,

wringing his scorched hands, "Tribes Hill is burning, Fisher's is on fire, and the Colonel and John and Harmon all murdered —all scalped and lying dead in the barn!——"

"Listen to me!" I cried, shaking the wretched fellow, "when did this happen? Are Sir John's people still here? Where are they?"

"It happened last night and lasted after sunrise this morning," he blubbered. "Everything is burning from Schoharie to the Nose, and they'll come back and kill the rest of us——"

I flung him aside, struck spurs, and galloped for Cayadutta Lodge.

Everywhere I looked I saw smoke; barns were but heaps of live coals, houses marked only by charred cellars out of which flames leaped.

Yet, I saw the church still standing, and Dr. Romeyn's parsonage still intact, though all doors and windows stood wide open and bedding and broken furniture lay scattered over the grass.

But Adam Fonda's house was burning and the dwelling of Major Jelles was on fire; and now I caught sight of Douw Fonda's great stone house, with its two wings and tall chimneys of hewn stone.

It was not burning, but shutters hung from their hinges, window glass was shattered, doors smashed in, and all over the trampled garden and lawn lay a débris of broken furniture, tattered books, bedding, fragments of fine china and torn garments.

And there, face downward on the bloody grass, lay old Douw Fonda, his aged skull split to the backbone, his scalp gone.

Such a sick horror seized me that I reeled in my saddle and the world grew dark before my eyes for a moment.

But my mind cleared again and my eyes, also; and I sat my horse, pistol in hand, searching the desolation about me for a sign of aught that remained alive in this awful spot.

I heard no more gunshots up the river. The silence was terrible.

At length, ill with fear, I got out of my saddle and led Kaya to the shattered gate and there tied her.

Then I entered that ruined mansion to search it for what I feared most horribly to discover,—searched every room, every closet, every corner from attic to cellar. And then came out and took my horse by the bridle.

For there was nobody within the house, living or dead—no sign of death anywhere save there on the grass, where that poor corpse lay, a grotesque thing sprawling indecently in its blood.

Then, as I stood there, a man appeared, slinking up the road. He was in his shirt sleeves, wore no hat, and his face and hair were streaked red from a wet wound over his left ear. He carried a fire-lock; and when he discovered me in my Continental uniform he swerved and shuffled toward me, making a hopeless gesture as he came on.

"They've all gone off," he called out to me, "green-coats, red-coats and savages. I saw them an hour since crossing the river some three miles above. God! What a harm have they done us here on this accursed day!"

He crept nearer and stood close beside me and looked down at the body of Douw Fonda. But in my overwhelming grief I no longer noticed him.

"Why, sir," says he, "a devil out o' hell would have spared yonder good old man. But Sir John's people slew him. I saw him die. I saw the murder done with my own eyes."

Startled from my agonized reflections, I turned and gazed at him, still stunned by the calamity which had crushed me.

"I say I saw that old man die!" he repeated shrilly. "I saw them scalp him, too!"

I summoned all my courage: "Did—did you know Penelope Grant?"

"Aye."

"Is—is she dead?" I whispered.

"I think she is, sir. Listen, sir: I am Jan Myndert, Bouw-Meester to Douw Fonda. I saw Mistress Grant this morning. It was after sunrise and our servants and black slaves had been long a-stirring, and soupaan a-cooking, and none dreamed of any trouble. No, sir! Why—God help us all!—the black wenches were at their Monday washing, and the farm bell was ringing, and I was at the new barrack a-sorting out seed.

"And the old gentleman, *he* was up and dressed and supped his porridge along with me, sir; for he rose always with the sun, sir, feeble though he seemed.

"I——" he passed a cinder-blackened hand across his hair; drew it away red and sticky; stood gazing at the stain with a stupid air until I could not endure his silence; and burst out:

"Where did you last see Mistress Grant?"

But my violence confused him, and it seemed difficult for him to speak when finally he found voice at all:

"Sir—as I have told you, I had been sorting seeds for early planting, in the barracks," he said tremulously, "and I was walk-

ing, as I remember, toward the house, when, of a sudden, I heard musket-firing toward Johnstown, and not very far distant.

"With that comes a sound of galloping and rattle o' wheels, and I see Barent Wemple standing up in his red-painted farm waggon, and whipping his fine colts, and a keg o' rum bouncing behind him in the waggon-box,—which rolled off as the horses reached the river—and galloped into it—them two colts, sir,—breast deep in the river!

"Then I shouts down to him: 'Barent! Barent! Is it them red devils of Sir John? Or why be you in such a God-a'mighty hurry?'

"But Barent he is too busy cutting his traces to notice me; and up onto one o' the colts he jumps and seizes t'other by the head, and away across the shoals, leaving his new red waggon there in the water, hub-deep.

"Then I run to the house and I fall to shouting: 'Look out! Look out! Sir John is in the Valley!' And then I run to the house, where my gun stands, and where the black boys and wenches are all a-screeching and a-praying.

"Somebody calls out that Captain Fisher's house is on fire; and then, of a sudden, I see a flock o' naked, whooping devils come leaping down the road.

"Then, sir, I saw Mistress Grant in her shift come out in the dew and stand yonder in her bare feet, a-looking across at them red devils, bounding and leaping about the Fisher place.

"Then, out o' the house toddles Douw Fonda with his gold headed cane and his favorite book. Sir, though the poor old gentleman was childish, he still knew an Indian when he saw one. 'Fetch me a gun!' he cries. 'I take command here!' And then he sees Mistress Grant, and he pipes out in his cracked voice: 'Stand your ground, Penelope! Have no fear, my child. I command this post! I will protect you!'

"The green-coats and savages were now swarming around the house of Major Jelles, whooping and yelling and capering and firing off their guns. Bang-bang-bang! Jesus! the noise of their musketry stopped your ears.

"Then Mistress Grant she took the old gentleman by the arm and was begging him to go with her through the orchard, where we now could see Mrs. Romeyn running up the hill and carrying her two little children in her arms.

"I also went to Mr. Fonda and took him by the other arm, but he walked with us only to the porch and there seized my gun that I had left there.

"'Stand fast, Penelope!' he pipes up, 'I will defend your life and honour!' And further he would not budge, but turns mulish, yet too feeble to lift the gun he clung to with a grip I could not loosen lest I break his bones.

"We got him, with his gun a-dragging, into the house, but could force him no farther, for he resisted and reproached me, demanding that I stand and face the enemy.

"At that, through the window of the library wing I see a body of green-coats,—some three hundred or better,—marching down the Schenectady road. And some score of these, and as many Indians, were leaving the Major's house, which they had fired; and now all began to run toward us, firing off their muskets at our house as they came on.

"I was grazed, as you see, sir, and the blow dashed out my senses for a moment. But when I came alive I found I had fallen beside the wainscot of the east wall, where is a secret spring panel made for Mr. Fonda's best books. My fall jarred it open; and into this closet I crawled; and the next moment the library was filled with the trample of yelling men.

"I heard Mistress Grant give a kind of choking cry, and, through the crack of the wainscot door, I saw a green-coat put one hand over her mouth and hold her, cursing her for a rebel slut and telling her to hush her damned head or he'd do the proper business for her.

"An Indian I knew, called Quider, and having only one arm, took hold of Mr. Fonda and led him from the library and out to the lawn, where I could see them both through the west window. The Indian acted kind to the old gentleman, gave him his hat and his book and cane, and conducted him south across the lawn. I could see it all plainly through the wainscot crack.

"Then, of a sudden, the one-armed Indian swung his hatchet and clove that helpless and bewildered old man clean down to his neck cloth. And there, before all assembled, he took the old man's few white hairs for a scalp!

"Then a green-coat called out to ask why he had slain such an old and feeble man, who had often befriended him; and the one-armed Indian, Quider, replied that if he hadn't killed Douw Fonda somebody else might have done so, and so he, Quider, thought he'd do it and get the scalp-bounty for himself.

"And all this time the Indians and green-coats were running like wild wolves all over the house, stealing, destroying, yelling, flinging out books from the library shelves, ripping off curtains

and bed-covers, flinging linen from chests, throwing crockery about, and keeping up a continual screeching.

"Sir, I do not know why they did not set fire to the house. I do not know how my hiding place remained unnoticed.

"From where I kneeled on the closet floor, and my face all over blood, I could see Mistress Grant across the room, sitting on a sofa, whither the cursing green-coat had flung her. She was deathly white but calm, and did not seem afraid; and she answered the filthy beasts coolly enough when they addressed her.

"Then a big chair, which they had ripped up to look for money, was pushed against my closet, and the back of it closed the wainscot crack, so that I could no longer see Mistress Grant.

"And that is all I know, sir. For the firing began again outside; they all ran out, and when I dared creep forth Mistress Grant was gone. . . . And I lay still for a time, and then found a jug o' rum. When I could stand up I followed the destructives at a distance. And, an hour since, I saw the last stragglers crossing the river rifts some three miles above us. . . . And that is all, I think, sir."

And that was all. . . . The end of all things. . . . Or so it seemed to me.

For now I cared no longer for life. The world had become horrible; the bright sunshine seemed a monstrous sacrilege where it blazed down, unveiling every detail of this ghastly Golgotha —this valley in ashes now made sacred by my dear love's martyrdom. Slowly I looked around me, still stupefied, helpless, not knowing where to seek my dead, which way to turn.

And now my dulled gaze became fixed upon the glittering river, where something was moving. . . . And presently I realized it was a batteau, poled slowly shoreward by two tall riflemen in their fringes.

"Holloa! you captain-mon out yonder!" bawled one o' them, his great voice coming to me through his hollowed hand.

Leading my horse I walked toward them as in a fiery nightmare, and the sun but a vast and dancing blaze in my burning eyes. One of the riflemen leaped ashore:

"Is anny wan alive in this place?" he began loudly; then: "Jasus! It's Captain Drogue. F'r the love o' God, asthore! Are they all dead entirely in Caughnawaga, savin' yourself, sorr, an' the Dominie's wife an' childer, an' the yellow-haired lass o' Douw Fonda——"

I caught him by the rifle-cape. My clutch shook him; and I was shaking, too, so I could not pronounce clearly:

"*Where* is Penelope Grant?" I stammered. "Where did you see her, Tim Murphy?"

"Who's that?" he demanded, striving to loosen my grip. "Ah, the poor lad, he's crazy! Lave me loose, avic! Is it the yellow-haired lass ye ask for?"

"Yes—where is she?"

"God be good to you, Jack Drogue, she's on the hill yonder with Mrs. Romeyn an' the two childer!——" He took my arm, turned me partly around, and pointed:

"D'ye mind the pine? The big wan, I mean, betchune the two ellums? 'Twas an hour since that we seen her foreninst the pine-tree yonder, an' the Romeyn childer hidin' their faces in her skirt——"

I swung my horse and flung myself across the saddle.

"She's safe, I warrant," cried Murphy, as I rode off; "Sir John's divils was gone off two hours whin we seen her safe and sound on the long hill!"

I galloped over the shattered fence which was still afire where the charred rails lay in the grass.

As I spurred up the bank opposite, I caught sight of a mounted officer on the stony Johnstown road, advancing at a trot, and behind him a mass of sweating militia jogging doggedly down hill in a rattle of pebbles and dust.

When the mounted officer saw me he shouted through the dust-cloud that Sir John had been at the Hall, seized his plate and papers, and a lot of prisoners, and had murdered innocent people in Johnstown streets.

Tim Murphy and his comrade, Elerson, also came up, calling out to the Johnstown men that they had come from Schoharie, and that both militia and Continentals were marching to the Valley.

There was some cheering. I pushed my horse impatiently through the crowd and up the hill. But a little way farther on the road was choked with troops arriving on a run; and they had brought cohorns and their ammunition waggon, and God knows what!—alas! too late to oppose or punish the blood-drenched demons who had turned the Caughnawaga Valley to a smoking hell.

Now, my horse was involved with all these excited people, and I, exasperated, thought I never should get clear of the soldiery and cohorns, but at length pushed a way through to the woods

on my right, and spurred my mare into them and among the larger elms and pines where sheep had pastured, and there was less brush.

I could not see the great pine now, but thought I had marked it down; and so bore again to the right, where through the woods I could see a glimmer of sun along cleared land.

It was rocky; my horse slipped and I was obliged to walk him upward among stony places, where moss grew green and deep.

And now, through a fringe of saplings, I caught a glimpse of the two elms and the tall pine between.

"Penelope!" I cried. Then I saw her.

She was standing as once she stood the first time ever I laid eyes on her. The sun shone in her face and made of her yellow hair a glory. And I saw her naked feet shining snow white, ankle deep in the wet grass.

As though sun-dazzled she drew one hand swiftly across her eyes when I rode up, leaned over, and swung her up into my arms. And earth and sky and air became one vast and thrilling void through which no sound stirred save the wild beating of her heart and mine.

Then, as from an infinite distance, came a thin cry, piercing our still paradise.

Her arms loosened on my neck; we looked down as in a dream; and there were the little Romeyn children in the grass, naked in their shifts, and holding tightly to my stirrup.

And now we saw light horsemen leading their mounts this way, and the poor Dominie's lady carried on a trooper's saddle, her bare foot clinging to the shortened stirrup.

Other troopers lifted the children to their saddles; a great hubbub began below us along the Schenectady highway, where I now heard drums and the shrill marching music of an arriving regiment.

I reached behind me, unstrapped my military mantle, clasped it around Penelope, swathed her body warmly, and linked up the chain. Then I touched Kaya with my left knee—she guiding left at such slight pressure—and we rode slowly over the sheep pasture and then along the sheep-walk, westward until we arrived at the bars. The bars were down and lay scattered over the grass. And thus we came quietly out into the Johnstown road.

So still lay Penelope in my arms that I thought, at times, she was asleep; but ever, as I bent over her, her dark eyes unclosed, gazing up at me in tragic silence.

Cautiously we advanced along the Johnstown road, Kaya cantering where the way was easy.

We passed ruined houses, still smoking, but Penelope did not see them. And once I saw a dead man lying near a blackened cellar; and a dead hound near him.

Long before we came in sight of Johnstown I could hear the distant quaver of the tocsin, where, on the fort, the iron bell rang ceaselessly its melancholy warning.

And after a while I saw a spire above distant woods, and the setting sun brilliant on gilt weather-vanes.

I bent over Penelope: "We arrive," I whispered.

One little hand stole out and drew aside the collar of the cloak; and she turned her head and saw the roofs and chimneys shining red in the westering sun.

"Jack," she said faintly.

"I listen, beloved."

"Douw Fonda is dead."

"Hush! I know it, love."

"Douw Fonda is with God since sunrise," she whispered.

"Yes, I know. . . . And many others, too, Penelope."

She shook her head vaguely, looking up at me all the while.

"It came so swiftly. . . . I was still abed. . . . The guns awoke me. . . . And the blacks screaming. I ran to the window of my chamber.

"A Continental soldier was driving an army cart toward the Johnstown road. And I saw him jump out of his cart,* cut his traces, mount, turn his horse, and gallop down the valley. . . . That was the first real fear that assailed me, when I saw that soldier flee. . . . I went below immediately; and saw Indians near the Fisher place. . . . But I could not persuade Mr. Fonda to escape with me through the orchard. . . . He would not go, Jack—he would not listen to me or to the Bouw-Meester, who also had hold of him.

"And when we went into the library somebody fired through the window and hit the Bouw-Meester. . . . I don't know what happened to him or where he fell. . . . For the next moment the house was full of green-coats and savages. . . . They led Mr. Fonda out of the house. . . . An Indian killed him with a hatchet. . . . A green-coat took hold of me and said he meant

* The gossipy, industrious, and diverting historian, Simms, whose account of this incident would seem to imply that Penelope Grant herself related it to him, gives a different version of her testimony. The statement he offers is signed: *"Mrs. Penelope Forbes. Her maiden name was Grant."* So Simms may have had it first hand.

to cut my throat for a damned rebel slut! But an Indian pushed him away. . . . They disputed. An officer of the Indian Department came into the library and told me to go out to the orchard and escape if I was able.

"Then a Tory neighbour of ours, Joseph Clement, came in and shouted out in low Dutch: 'Laat de vervlukten rabble starven!' * . . . A green-coat clubbed his musket to slay me, but the Indian officer caught the gun and called out to me: 'Run! Run, you yellow-haired slut!'

"But I dared not stir to pass by where Clement stood with his gun. I caught up a heavy silver candle-stick, broke the window with two blows, and leaped out into the orchard. . . . Clement ran around the house and I saw him enter the orchard, carrying a gun and looking for me; but I lay very still under the lilac hedge; and he must have thought I had run down to the river, for he went off that way.

"Then I got to my feet and crept up the hill. . . . And presently saw Mrs. Romeyn and the children toiling up the hill; and helped her carry them. . . . All the morning we hid there and looked down at the burning houses. . . . And after a long while the firing grew more distant.

"And then—and then—*you* came! My dear lord!—my lover. . . . My own lover who has come to me at last!"

* In Valley Dutch: "Let the accursed rebel die!"

AFTERMATH

I KNOW not how it shall be with me and mine! In this year of our Lord, 1782, in which I write, here in the casemates at West Point, the war rages throughout the land, and there seems no end to it, nor none likely that I can see.

That horrid treason which, through God's mercy, did not utterly confound us and deliver this fortress to our enemy, still seems to brood over this calm river and the frowning hills that buttress it, like a low, dark cloud.

But I believe, under God, that our cause is now clean purged of all villainy, and all that is sordid, base, and contemptible.

I believe, under God, that we shall accomplish our freedom and recover our ancient and English liberties in the end.

That dull and German King, who sits yonder across the water, can never again stir in any American the faintest echo of that allegiance which once all offered simply and without question.

Nor can his fat jester, my Lord North, contrive any new pleasantry to seduce us, or any new and bloody deviltry to make us fear the wrath of God's anointed or the monkey chatter of his clown.

For us, the last king has sat upon a throne; the last privilege has been accorded to the last and noble drone; the last slave's tax has long been paid.

Yet—and it sounds strange—*England* still seems *home* to us. . . . We think of it as home. . . . It is in our blood; and I am not ashamed to say it. And I think a hundred years may pass, and, in our hearts, shall still remain deep, deep, a tenderness for that far, ocean-severed home our grandsires knew as England.

I say it spite o' the German King, spite of his mad ministers, spite o' British wrath and scorn and jibes and cruelty. For, by God! I believe that we ourselves who stand in battle here are the true mind and heart and loins of England, fighting to slay her baser self!

Well, we are here in the Highlands, my sweetheart-wife and I. . . . I who now wear the regimentals of a Continental Colonel, and have a regiment as pretty as ever I see—though it be not overstrong in numbers. But, oh, the powder toughened line o' them in their patched blue-and-buff! And their bright bayonets! Sir, I would not boast; and ask I pardon if it seems so. . . .

Below us His Excellency, calm, imperturbable, holds in his hand our destinies, juggling now with Sir Henry Clinton, now with my Lord Cornwallis, as suits his temper and his purpose.

The traitor, Arnold, ravages where he may; the traitor, Lee, sulks in retreat; and Conway has confessed his shame; and the unhappy braggart, Gates, now mourns his laurels, wears his willows, and sits alone, a broken and preposterous man.

I think no day passes but I thank God for my Lord Stirling, for our wise Generals Greene and Knox and Wayne, for the gallant young Marquis, so loved and trusted by His Excellency.

But war is long—oh, long and wearying!—and a dismal and vexing business for the most.

I, being in garrison at this fortress, which is the keystone of our very liberties, find that, in barracks as in the field, every hour brings its anxieties and its harassing duties.

Yet, thank God, I have some hours of leisure. . . . And we have leased a pretty cottage within our works—and our two children seem wondrous healthy and content. . . . Both have yellow hair. I wish they had their mother's lovely eyes! . . . But, for the rest, they have her beauty and her health.

And shall, no doubt, inherit all the beauty of her mind and heart.

Comes a soldier servant where I sit writing:

"Sir: Colonel Forbes' lady; her compliments to Colonel Forbes, and desires to be informed how soon my Colonel will be free to drink a dish of tea with my lady?"

"Pray offer my compliments and profound respect to my lady, Billy, and say that I shall have the honour of drinking a dish of tea with my lady within no more than five amazing minutes!"

And so he salutes and off he goes; and I gather up the sheaf of memoirs I have writ and lock them in my desk against another day.

And so take leave of you, with every kindness, because Penelope should not sit waiting.